FOR LOVE — OR MONEY?

#90

HAVE COMICS FINALLY COME OF AGE — OR JUST BECOME BIG BUSINESS?

JACK KIRBY
JIM STARLIN
ROB LIEFIELD
MARC SILVESTRI

AND MANY MORE COMICS CREATORS CALL 'EM AS THEY SEE 'EM!

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COMICS INTERVIEW

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STEVE FABIAN

UP FRONT

ART FOR ART'S SAKE BUT MONEY FOR GOD'S SAKE

Or so the saying goes.

As my late friend, writer E. Hoffmann Price, once commented, "Whether comics or paperbacks are an art form has built into it the implied statement that either medium ever was an art form. *Alors*, irrelevant, however amusing. I never pretended to be an artist, sincere or insincere. The first thing I had to do in 1932 was learn to write well enough to get 2½¢ a word, instead of the ½¢ to ¼¢ which some of my contemporaries [such as **Robert E. Howard**] were getting. I am not downgrading [comics]. I simply comment on the writer-*artist*. If he likes to regard himself as an artist, there is nothing unconstitutional about the notion. And, it does have genuine entertainment value."

The foregoing is condensed, but makes the point (his letter appears in its entirety in CI #24).

To debate whether comics are art or commerce — or both — calls for a definition of what constitutes "art." My old friend, Marvel editor **Jim Salicrup,** has argued the **Andy Warhol**-esque attitude that "*everything* is art." The obverse, of course, is that you might as well say *nothing* is art. It amounts to the same thing. But to attempt to define art as anything less than an absolute is merely a matter of degree and personal opinion — not a definition at all, merely an expression of individual preference and nothing more.

Money, on the other hand, is not a matter of fancy, but of quantifiable sums: That is, fact.

Art or commerce?
Fact or fancy?
Love or money?

Read what those in the know have to say about the subject — then let us hear what *you* think. Send us a letter. "The Last Word" is an open forum and I can't wait to find out how fans and other fellow professionals in the comics field feel.

-David

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KIRBY: "I fought with editors, I fought with

FOR LOVE OR MONEY

JACK KIRBY, 1939 — New York World's Fair. Next pg.: Jack's Darkseid.

Fred Greenberg held his first Los Angeles comics convention in March '90 and it was a nice gathering of New York comic-book artists and writers (which had me scratching my head and saying, "Oh, I thought you was living back East!" — to which the answer was, "No, dude, too groady back there!"). The atmosphere was nice, the bargains were plenty (despite the inflated guide prices) because we're in a depression and comics are a luxury item so the dealers are willing to make honest deals, and that Fred sure put on a real good show and had nice people working for him, especially the birds — hello, ladies!

Well, one of the panel discussions was on comics for love and/or money; Jack Kirby, Mike Vosburg, Marc Silvestri, Rob Liefeld, and Jims Starlin and Valentino all got in their two cents worth.

Not that he needs any introduction — but for those new to comics, Jack Kirby is a living legend in the field. He was interviewed in COMICS INTERVIEW #41 (also available in our MASTERS OF MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL) and Ken Viola's MASTERS OF THE COMICS sums up his comics career as follows:

Born Jacob Kurtzberg in 1917 in New York's Lower East Side, Jack Kirby helped change the early comic-book format as well as give the genre its own vocabulary. Where the books of the time were largely reprints of newspaper strips or Sunday pages, Kirby opened things up by realizing that he was not telling stories in daily or weekly snippets but in 10- and 12-page segments. He broke up the pages in new ways, introduced innovative splash panels that stretched across two pages, and created a sense of cinematic movement.

After his drawings were first published, he was hired by the Fleischer animation studios and worked on POPEYE shorts. He later worked for the Lincoln Features Syndicate, drawing political cartoons, true-fact panels, and assorted strips, before teaming with Joe Simon in the '40s for some of his most memorable work, including one of the most successful comic-book characters

All artwork accompanying this panel discussion is ©1990 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc., unless otherwise noted.

the publishers, and they still took my stuff."

ever, CAPTAIN AMERICA, for Marvel.

Kirby went solo in the '50s though, and with assistance from Stan Lee, he was a major factor in the '60s superhero revival with his work on THE FANTASTIC FOUR, THOR, THE AVENGERS, and others in which he introduced the mix of operatic heroics and explosive fantasy that was the base of Marvel's immense popularity from the '60s on. In the '70s he went to DC Comics to draw and write the "Fourth World" series, including such titles as THE NEW GODS and FOREVER PEOPLE, which blended his bravura drawing style with his personal slam-bang cosmology. Currently, Kirby develops characters and stories for Saturday morning cartoons.

As for Mike Vosburg (who once collaborated with COMICS INTERVIEW publisher David Anthony Kraft on the original SHE-HULK series), his comics art has illustrated more series than you can shake a stick at; most recently, Mike has worked with Howard Chaykin on AMERICAN FLAGG and more.

Artist Mark Silvestri (cover-featured on COMICS INTERVIEW #76) recently relinquished Marvel's fan favorite X-MEN series in favor of breaking new ground in greener fields.

Rob Liefield is making his mark on Marvel's NEW MUTANTS.

From MASTER OF KUNG FU through WARLOCK to DREADSTAR, SILVER SURFER, the controversial BATMAN: A DEATH IN THE FAMILY and beyond, writer/artist Jim Starlin has made his mark in comics (we last spoke to Starlin in COMICS INTERVIEW #4).

Writer/artist Jim Valentino bridged the gap from small press and independent comics, such as NORMALMAN, to mainstream work for the comics majors.

Altogether, a talented and interesting array of comics professionals, brought together to discuss what motivates them most on an open-forum panel, open to questions from the audience.

I thought it turned out well even though I was five minutes late . . .

PAUL POWER: *Do you guys find that after a period of time it's hard to get the enthusiasm up? What do you guys do to maintain your enthusiasm?*

ROB LIEFIELD: You lose a lot of enthusiasm when your creative vision, whatever it is, is diluted by other people, like bad inkers or bad editors or people

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SILVESTRI: "After being on X-MEN for three years,

who think they write better than you do and rewrite your work for you, stuff like that. I've run into it, I'm sure everybody else has, too. That gets on your nerves after awhile, that makes you lose it a little bit. I think you just have to keep on setting new goals for yourself.

MARC SILVESTRI: A lot of that can make you lose interest in one project or another, or sometimes it's just time. After being on X-MEN for three years, it's just long enough for me, you know. So you go on to something else. I felt the burnout coming. I would be cheating myself, I would be cheating other people working on the book with me, I would be cheating everyone who pays a buck to read it, so it was time to leave.

JIM VALENTINO: Also, something that keeps you going is if you're feeding a family. That's a real good motivational factor. I think we should ask **Mr. Kirby** because he's been in this business a lot longer than the lot of us.

JACK KIRBY: Well, speaking for myself, the subject matter doesn't matter to me. It can be any kind of a subject, the idea is to get a story out of it. That's what I've been managing to do all these years, is getting a story out of whatever kind of angle I could dig up — communicating with the people who are reading that story. I don't want to be some high-falutin' intellectual. I like to inject the kind of thought the average guy has, I like to communicate with him. And I like to give him the kind of story that is believable. He's my target, the average guy is my target.

ROB: So, you're constantly trying to reach out and communicate your ideas to someone else?

KIRBY: Yes. It can be symbols in the most fantastic surroundings, yet there's *got* to be a human element in that story that the reader recognizes and says, "Yes, he's got so-and-so kind of powers but he's still a human being, there's something human about him."

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Jack, you still have to knock out those pages to make a living for your family?*

KIRBY: I work fast, I work hard, I work almost all day. But I do things in my panels and balance my pages in a correct manner so I deliver pages that are filled with good illustration balanced by *emotional, strong* figures. There would always be something in those panels reaching *out* to the reader. And then the reader would say, "Yes, that thing is true."

I did pre-war stories. I did one with a white tape, and if you ran across one side of it you were okay — but not if you went across the other side. I turned it into a very very dramatic story between two racers. The bad racer won, but all these men came running out on the wrong side of that tape and so they were all blown up.

There was an element of *truth* to that story despite the fact that the story didn't take place. It was worthy of reading, it was worthy of deliberating upon what it

Gigantic X-MEN (pencil) panel from the limber hand of Marc Silvestri.

it's long enough for me — I felt burnout coming."

said. That little bit of realism is what you clue the reader to think about, and that story went over very well. We've got to talk to ourselves. We've got to realize that all of us are one. And the elements we put in our stories *have* to be understood. The guy says, "Yes, I would do a thing like that."

ROB: It has to be believability. You can have a guy walking up the wall if it has a believable element in it.

KIRBY: Yes, it's got to be a little believable. We did what we felt were very very good works, and we got a great response. **Joe Simon** and I wanted sales,

VOSBURG: "Most of us started out very enthused, but

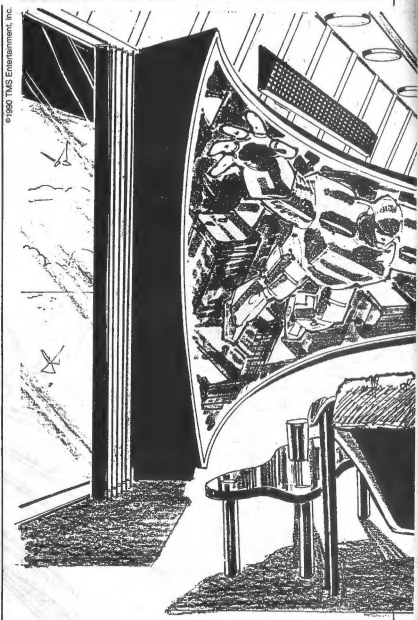
Joe and I *got* sales. And when you get sales the book grows and you grow and the money grows. That's the way we thought. And then we began to generate something *larger*, the field began to become larger, and we grew with it — and we delivered. And for starters, it was an opportunity that Joe and I took advantage of, and it *happened* to work out.

ROB: Well, I thought of comics as something I really wanted to do. A friend of mine a couple of years ago told me that he thought that the money to be made in comics was just going to get better, and not knowing a lot about financial things I wasn't sure, I wasn't *counting* on it. I am continually *amazed* at how much money there is being made by some people, what there is to be made. It has gotten better. But you've got to *love* it. It's a lot of work and you really have to love it. There's faster ways to make money than comics, so you've really got to love it.

VALENTINO: I only have one thing to add, you get into it for the love of comics. But comics *is* a business and you have to approach it — if you're going to be a professional, if this is how you're going to put food on your table — you have to approach it as a business. And that means you have to approach it with a lawyer. Before you bend over to sign that contract, you make sure your pants are firmly cinched. *(Laughter.)* You've really got to approach it that way; it *is* a business. That's how you're making your living, whether you love it or not.

MIKE VOSBURG: You know, I think you hit a key point. Most of us as young artists all started out very *enthused* about what we were doing, but one of the bad things that happens along the way is you run into others who realize that there is money to be made and are constantly thinking how they can make more of it. Consequently, the longer you work in the business you achieve a certain amount of bitterness, become disgruntled, whatever. You're *creating* these products, putting your life into them, and the profits are being skimmed off the top with only a certain amount being handed back to you. I think that, more than anything else, tends to work on the love of the work you're doing.

The financial rewards add to your enthusiasm. It's very difficult to work in a cold apartment. You can't get up the same enthusiasm that you can when you're being financially rewarded and you can go out and do different things, see the world. So you really are *forced* to become a businessman, or you'll end up a pauper.



MARC: It's essentially, I guess . . . where they dangle this one little carrot in front of you. I mean, how many advances do you think would have been made in medicine or anything if there weren't some kind of reward? You have to be motivated somehow and, like Mike was saying, it *helps* your attitude to know that you've got a nice paycheck coming in the mail next month for something you just did.

It's frustrating. I've been in this business for nine years and for a long time I was struggling just to pay some bills. It's a shame. You do the same amount of work as the guy who's sitting next to you, but because that guy's on a big book and he's got fan popularity and you don't, that guy's making ten times more than you are. That can be very frustrating. That happened more than once to me, I thought it was going to drive me out of the business completely. But fortunately things turned around and comics have been really good the past few years.

But when it's frustrating, that's where

along the way you realize there's money to be made."

Panoramic set design for the BIONIC SIX cartoon — by Mike Vosburg.

the love of the business has to come in. That's what's going to take you into the next issue, into the next issue after that — because if you can't pay the bills, if you're not making a lot of money, it's got to come from somewhere. You're not going to get very far if you're doing it just for the paycheck, so obviously you have to have something inside that's driving you, and that is what you want to create.

It's all very much the same, any kind of creative endeavor — you have to have either an incredible love for what you're doing, or a lust for money, or if you're lucky you can have both. This is one of the few businesses where if you're in it long enough, if you work at it hard enough, you can have both. There are a lot of businesses where you just can't have that. There's a lot of money in being a lawyer, but to be honest being a lawyer wouldn't thrill me at all. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *Jim, I was wondering, in regard to you doing DREADSTAR and moving away from company-owned comics, doing your own stuff, how was that transition for you?*

JIM STARLIN: Well, I was out of comics before then. The reason I took DREADSTAR from Marvel to First Comics is Marvel stopped *paying* me. *(Laughter.)* They have a terrible book-keeping department up there. But there wasn't any problem. I liked working with the editorial staff up at First. **Bob Garcia** is up there now, a very nice fellow.

PAUL: *Did you hit burnout at all?*

STARLIN: I felt burned out after nine *years* on DREADSTAR, just doing the artwork, but I don't hit burnout all that much. I have a lot more trouble with it at the beginning than I do later on. One of

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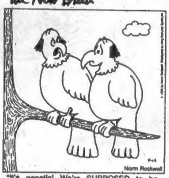

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STARLIN: "I think burnout is a common occurrence."

the first jobs I did was a love story involving Tom the Truckdriver, Wendy the Waitress, and Dick the Dude, and those five pages were like pulling teeth. *(Laughter.)* But now, having been here for awhile, I can pick things that are more interesting to do. I can do a BATMAN, I can do a SILVER SURFER — that's *much* more fun to do than Tom the Truckdriver.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Do you think that maybe the reason a lot of people burn out is because someone like Mr. Kirby can work with Joe Simon and do romances when that was what was putting food on his table, and at the same time somewhere later down the road when super-heroes came back he could basically help* build *an industry with Stan Lee doing something that was completely different — or maybe not so different to him because he'd already been around. Do you think that the market is restricted now in terms of mainstream comics?*

MARC: The market's not really restricted. There's all sorts of publishers out there publishing all sorts of different stuff, it depends really upon how much money you want to make. You're not going to make a lot of money on independent comics.

MIKE: I don't think the market is restricted, it's the money that's restricted.

MARC: Right.

MIKE: If you want to make money you've got to do super-heroes, you've got to work on the mainstream books, or you've basically got to come up with a new commercial idea that's going to be *very* successful.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *The reason I was wondering was because there's this particular artist that I like a lot — I'm not going to mention his name but I think he's very well paid — who has a way of* burning *out after 22 issues or so on a book. People who collect his work even say, "Oh, I wonder how long it'll be before he* burns *out on this!"* (Laughter.)

STARLIN: I think burnout — *(laughter.)* — it's a very common occurrence for all of us, I think. No matter what kind of money you're talking about, you do something for two or three years, especially in a business as *solitary* as comics, it just gets to the point where you get really sick of those characters. After awhile it really does get to you, so you have to bounce around with it. Maybe that's why Jack — I don't know if I should be speaking for you on this — but maybe that's why he never really got bored, because he bounced so much.

Illustration by Jim Starlin.

KIRBY: Well, that's probably part of it. I was always going into something different.

STARLIN: You've done cowboys, you've done romance, you've done every hero there is.

KIRBY: There's not much I haven't covered. **Joe Simon** and I discovered the love magazines and wondered why we hadn't done them all those years. There they were, the love books were hanging from those newsstands, right in front of our eyes, and we'd been passing them and doing fantastic characters. Suddenly we discovered, "My God, nobody's ever done a love story!" And so we brought out a book which began the romance comics. We began to do conventional

THE HULK is © 1989 M.E.G., Inc. / THE FOUR-ARMED TERROR is © 1989 DC Comics, Inc. / ARTWORK is © 1983-88 D. Hamilton & Jack Kirby

Jimmy Olsen's FOUR-ARM TERROR vs Marvel's HULK, by Jack "KING" Kirby.

KIRBY: "The point is a story to pull in a wider audience."

things — *(Laughter.)* And the book sold very well! It was a new type of comic book, nobody had ever seen a romance comic book. We had a new field, it became a new field, it blossomed into the romance field. The romance field is a staple of the movies.

What we do in comic books are just silent movies, and basically I think we're all movie persons. We're trying to make our characters perform, we're trying to make the story interesting, and we have to make a new movie all the time. And we've got to find a quantum interest in that new movie to gain an audience, because that's our purpose. You gain the audience. The more audience you have, the more money you're going to make. So the point is to make a story that pulls in a wider audience.

That wide audience is where you get the money for that book, because they love that story and they're waiting for the next one, and they *know* instinctively that you're the type of person who will deliver that kind of story to them, so they'll wait for your book in particular. That's the psychology behind it. You've got to find something *new*. You've got to *deliver* in a powerful manner. You've got to know what the next guy *likes*, you've got to *know* the next guy. And that book will come across for him. I never had any doubts about anything I ever did, I knew I could do it. There was never any doubt in my mind.

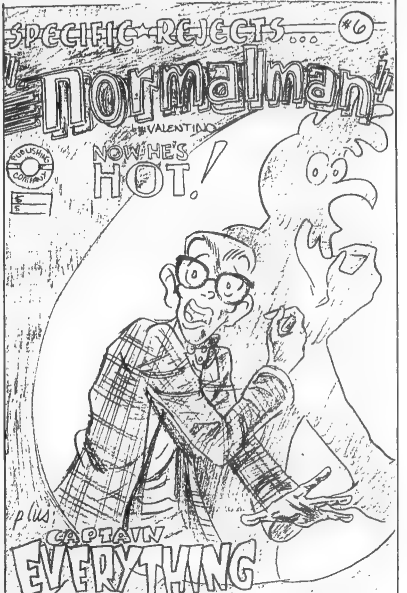
AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Rob, Marc, you're relatively new artists compared to —*

ROB: To the old fossils. *(Laughter.)*

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *How is it that you happened to get into it? What was it that you had to do to get in it? And what were the difficulties that you guys experienced along the way?*

MARC: Well, I've been in this business for nine years so I'm not *that* new at it. I think, when I got in, it was kind of easier. There was a point where the industry was really expanding and there was a glut of products but not a lot of creative people to do them. I kind of just waltzed in to one of these conventions in Chicago with a portfolio of stuff that I had, and they were real open to new talent.

I sucked, it turned out — some people think I still do. *(Laughter.)* But they still have a habit of picking out something and saying, "Well, maybe in five years this guy will have something and he'll do work of professional quality, let's start him out now on some book that nobody reads." They did that with me, and they nurture you that way. But when I came in



An old (and rare) look at a rough-pencil cover for Val's NORMALMAN

the market was wide open for creative people — even for writers, which has always been the hardest, breaking in as a writer. Artists, if you've got even remotely what it takes, you'll find work somewhere. With me it was just a question of being in the right place at the right time.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Is that what they do now?*

MARC: You'll have to ask someone else.

VALENTINO: It's going to get that way.

ROB: Yeah, I think it's coming back to that. I only broke in about three years ago, they were putting out a message in the fan press for whatever that they needed more new talent. I had sent some stuff in the mail to some smaller companies but I hadn't gotten a whole lot of response —

VALENTINO: Don't ever do that, by the way.

ROB: Yeah. When I've been in the offices, the few times I have, the editors have tons of junk on their desks — you have to see it, there's so much stuff in the

LIEFIELD: "I showed my stuff, but like Marc I

Jack Kirby & Mike Royer.

LORD OF LIGHT... what would have been the most expensive film ever made, and the largest amusement

offices — that when they get a package from some person they don't work with and whose name they don't know, it's going to take a lot for them to open that package, and even more for them to get back to you.

Go to the conventions. I went to a convention and there was an editor there from DC who I showed my stuff, and they were interested, and then I went to Marvel and they actually were more interested. DC gave me the first plot and

just stunk, just really reeked — it was goofy."

park in the world. Total budget was reported to have been between two and four-hundred million dollars.

I was real anxious to get at it, but like Marc I just stunk, just really reeked. *(Laughter.)*

And I was really *shocked* because I was avoiding Marvel and DC. Then my friend told me, "Go try Marvel because DC, there's only one guy there." I said, "Marvel wouldn't even look at me." But the editor took a look and immediately gave me figures to do for the HANDBOOK thing they put out I was *shocked!* Then through the mail and the

VALENTINO: "You get some instant gratification. It's

phone — it was goofy because I never knew that you could call these companies, I thought they had secret numbers or something — *(Laughter.)*

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *How do you get those secret numbers?*

ROB: Through a secret friend. *(Laughter.)* So, through a combination of all these things I broke thorugh. But I think right now in a lot of areas — inkers, there's not enough inkers — I think if you're good you'll always break in. Like Marc said, they look for what they can work with.

MARC: They're real good at that.

ROB: Yeah.

MARC: They can *spot* something. The work may not look good right now, but they know.

MIKE: Before you even think about showing an editor your portfolio, though, do your own work, learn how to draw. You can't write a letter without knowing the alphabet, you can't draw a comic without knowing anatomy, perspective, composition, storytelling. Learn your job first, then show your stuff.

And I don't know about everybody else, but I don't know how many times I've looked at drawings with **Todd McFarlane's** figures, or whoever the latest guy is. That isn't going to get you a job. Don't come up with a whole comic book traced from a **Jack Kirby** comic book, they'll recognize it. I guarantee it.

MARC: That's how I got my job — thanks, Jack! *(Laughter.)*

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *To come back to the love versus money thing: You get into it initially from learning to draw, but then you have to deal with the publisher. How does how you interface with the publisher and how much you draw affect what you do?*

MIKE: Unless you're working with a real small independent, you've probably never even met the publisher. I never have, maybe **Mr. Kirby** has.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *So they don't really interfere with your story at all?*

MIKE: You mean the editor.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *The editor, yeah.*

KIRBY: Speaking for myself, I *fought* with editors, I *fought* with the publishers, and they still took my stuff. *(Laughter.)*

STARLIN: Fortunately, there's enough editors around where if you run into a real jerk you just go on to the next one. As you go along you find yourself a couple of good editors you can work with and you just stick working with them.

VALENTINO: When you find a good one it's like gold. *(Laughter.)*

STARLIN: There are some of them out there. There are some incredible jerks out there who should have electro-shock therapy. But when you run into them you just go on to somebody else.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *You choose, basically, your editor?*

MIKE: Well, they come to you with some kind of offer, a series or something like that. You know the guy's a jerk and you'll pass, unless you're broke and starving.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *It's usually the editor already has the book, though.*

ROB: Right. Jim, THE SILVER SURFER, let's take that case in point.

STARLIN: I didn't know the editor. I thought I'd give it a shot. We did a couple of stories and it worked out fine, and we've been going at it and he's very good to work with. But on the other hand, sometimes I do projects I propose and I will, like, come up to an editor and say, "Why don't you edit this thing for me?" when I know he can do the job without driving myself or *himself* crazy. You learn as you go along.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Getting back to the mainstream versus independent comics: For an artist trying to break into the field do you think it would be advantageous to go to an independent to get experience and then once you have your name in some book then go to the mainstream and try to get a job there?*

STARLIN: It worked for **Ron Lim,** who does THE SILVER SURFER now. He started working over at First.

VALENTINO: He did other stuff before that.

MIKE: It does help to see where you've been, because you get a distance from it, you're not so emotionally attached to it, and you can see your mistakes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *What I mean is, to the company itself — like if I was going to Marvel and could say, "Well, I worked on this title and this title and this title.*

MIKE: They don't care about that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *You were talking about the love-money situation and about getting burned out after doing something over a matter of time. Does going to conventions and talking to all your fans and all of that recharge you sometimes?*

VALENTINO: It helps a little bit, but by the time I get home I will have forgotten about it. *(Laughter.)* If I had my pages right here I'd be working like crazy.

KIRBY: The sales tell you everything.

ROB: It's very nice and all that, it's nice for us to get out of the house.

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ROZ KIRBY: These are our only vacations, going to the conventions.

KIRBY: Meeting people is another thing, it's a *wonderful* experience. For instance, I've had a wonderful time tonight just meeting you people, talking

nice to know that people appreciate what you're doing."

Character designs from the mind of Mike Vosburg.

to you. It's been a wonderful experience for me. If I were to do another comic at this minute –

ROZ: God forbid. *(Laughter.)*

KIRBY: — a lot of the people would probably resemble you. Not exactly, but they'd be reminiscent of this kind of audience, the people who are assembled here, because that would be inside me. That's what I try to get out of it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Doesn't it make it that much more work?*

VALENTINO: But you get some instant gratification. *(Laughter.)* It's nice to know that the work you're doing in your little room — when it's nice and sunny outside and all that kind of thing but you're stuck to the drawing board — it's nice to know that people appreciate what you're doing.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Why is it*

Unpublished page from Fantastic Four #87.

©1975 DC Comics

Huge pencil drawing of Jack's Mr. Miracle, with his sidekick (upper-left corner), Oberon... circa 1973.

STARLIN: "A lot of writers are guys who started out

harder for a writer than an artist?

MARC: An artist can show them a page and they can tell by one glance whether or not you know how to draw. For a writer, it's really hard to get somebody to sit down and look at something.

STARLIN: You also have to realize that all the editors are writers.

ROB: They need more artists than they do writers.

VALENTINO: And chances are they can do it better than you can anyway, so why would they give the story to you? And also, when you do try out to be a writer, all you're allowed to give them is a little plot synopsis anyway. They're not going to read a script that you give them. They're not going to read it, they just won't.

MARC: It's not impossible to break in as a writer, it's just harder.

VALENTINO: You basically have to kidnap someone. *(Laughter.)*

STARLIN: The strange thing, also, is a lot of the writers are guys who started out to be artists originally, started out working in the offices doing lettering and inking and whatever and eventually got into the writing end of it.

VALENTINO: It helps to hang around — even if you just get people's coffee.

MIKE: One of the advantages that you have drawing is that you're writing in terms of pictures. It's very difficult working with writers who give you too many cerebral ideas, or too many words, and then the action will be crammed into one or two frames. The easiest script that I've ever worked off of in my life was one of **Howard Chaykin's**. He gave me a little synopsis, like six lines, and each line was its own little picture. It was so simple to do because he told me the story not in a series of words or ideas or interactions but basically in a series of pictures. That's what we work in.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *This is a question for each one of you: When did you start reading comics?*

ROB: I just went in to the barber shop and the guy had a stack of comics. My dad didn't want me to read them, which is ironic because he loves that I do them. *(Laughter.)*

STARLIN: I don't remember how old I was, but I remember — **Gardner Fox** was this writer over at DC and he liked to use the word "unique" a lot — I had no idea what "unique" meant, I thought you pronounced it un-eh-kyue. *(Laughter.)* That was the first time I ever went to a dictionary to find out what a word meant, and it was from reading a comic book.

MIKE: Actually, I *stopped* reading comics when I was about twelve because I discovered books, but I've never stopped looking at them. The pictures in comics are always what amazed me. If the pictures aren't interesting, they're not going to make me read the words. It's always been a very visual medium for me.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *When did you start, do you remember?*

MIKE: When I was four or five, we always had comics. But it's always been a very visual thing for me, that's really what's attractive to me about comics. I like to draw! But in terms of the reading of them, I prefer movies or books. *(Audience gasps.)* Well, of course, I'm an artist, so I'm functionally illiterate. *(Laughter.)*

MARC: My own devotion to comics came from a cousin who was an avid comics collector. He would always have all these comics laying around the house, and the ones that I always went straight for were the Warrens, the old black-and-white magazines.

MIKE: Because they were *racier!*

MARC: Well, VAMPIRELLA, okay — I *loved* VAMPIRELLA! *(Laughter.)* Yes, that's where my attraction to comics derives from. So that's where I started, and I guess I was around ten. I used to go into his basement and read through the

©1990 Jim Starlin

to be artists, and eventually got into the writing."

Previous page: Illustration from Jim Starlin's "Among Madmen" (pencils and inks). This page: group shot of Marvel's THE NEW MUTANTS (pencils & inks by Rob Liefield).

KIRBY: "I found my drawings became more intricate. The

VAMPIRELLA stack.

And, basically, whatever artist appealed to me, the flashier he was, the better. I was young - and I think a lot of people have this kind of feeling — more is better. The more crappola there is on the page, "This guy must be *great!*" You know, maybe he *can't* draw, but he's got so much crap on this page! *(Laughter.)* I was impressed by that stuff a lot. That's why the black-and-whites impress me a lot, they do all this stuff -- lights and darks and 20,000,000 lines to an eyebrow. You don't have an appreciation at that age unless it's formulistic, really. When I was that age I had a problem imagining things that weren't there in front of me, and I used to love **Neal Adams's** stuff because he had a way of putting everything there, stating the obvious, actually.

But as I grew older I started to appreciate simplicity more, the **Jack Kirbys** and the **John Buscemas** who just draw and don't have to do all kinds of stuff — just pure drawing ability. And to this day those two are probably my two biggest influences. I still have this FANTASTIC FOUR issue where they go into the Negative Zone, it was an issue where Jack and John kind of mixed panels and traded punches — *great* stuff to look at.

It was a two-part story and I still look at those, the stuff just knocks me out still to this day.

KIRBY: Is there another way of making a comic book? *(Laughter.)*

ROB: I like Jack's stuff, I collected some of his earlier stuff, but you don't really have an appreciation of things until you get older. I was knocked out by the "realistic" guys, too. Then Jim turned me on to Jack's stuff just by the power and the energy he had in his work. It's stuff that I look for in other artists, and that's what I make. You flip thorugh anything that Jack did and people are coming at you 100 miles per hour in the *perfect* gesture — you couldn't have done it better, you know. Really extended figure work and great gestures. And as far as layouts, he always gave you a really big shot — which is becoming more and more commercial in comics — and it was always the really big shot that would truly grab your attention.

STARLIN: If I could add to that, I believe sincerely that **Jack Kirby** created the blueprint from whence *all* super-hero comics are derived. He created the dynamics, he created the *power*. His figures didn't leap *across* the page, they leaped *out* of it! That was **Jack Kirby.** When I was a kid *that's* what turned me on.

I remember my dad talking to me for *years* about CAPTAIN AMERICA, how he loved it, and when I saw AVENGERS #4 in this rack I *grabbed* it and went running through the store, "Is this him, is this him?" And the guy behind the counter and my dad just both went, "Holy Moley, Captain America!" I had to go back and get two more, one for my dad and one for the guy behind the counter. *(Laughter.)* It's that kind of *energy* that stays with you all your life, and that's the kind of comic I want to do — I think pretty much everyone wants to do.

KIRBY: I began reading comics in THE DAILY NEWS and THE JOURNAL. They were very large color pages in THE JOURNAL, very attractive. They had strips like BARNEY GOOGLE and MAGGIE AND JIGGS, that kind of thing. And they *attracted* me, and so I began doodling myself on the tenement floor — the janitor would beat me all the time. *(Laughter.)* And I began to do them more and more in other places, and then my *mother* began beating me. *(Laughter.)* And I never stopped. I found that I loved to draw, and my drawings became more intricate. The more intricate I made them, the more interested I became in

more intricate I made them, the more interested I became."

The unpublished (original) cover for Fantastic Four #64.

Silvestri's original pencils for the cover of X-MEN #249.

KIRBY: "I'm retired now, but I've done every subject."

doing them, illustrating other types of things. And you go on from there.

When comic books came out, it was a boon for me. I could tell an entire story in 22 pages — I can't tell you what a wonderful feeling that was, to be able to tell an *entire* story in 22 pages. In the syndicated stories that takes you six weeks, so comic books were a boon for me. I loved them, I wrote them, I built them, and nobody could stop me. I'm retired now, but I've done every subject under the sun. I've never done anything to be ashamed of, I've never done anything that would shame the reader or would hurt people, so I think I've done my job well.

(Applause.)

Another pencil panel from Marvel's X-MEN . . . by Silvestri.

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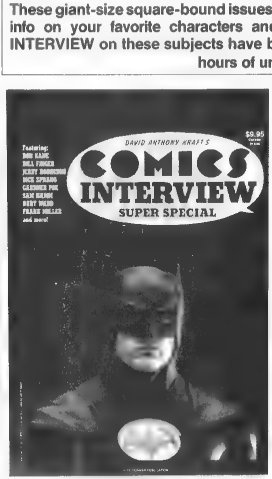

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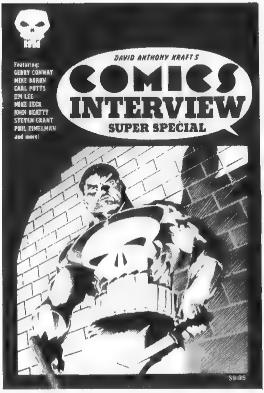

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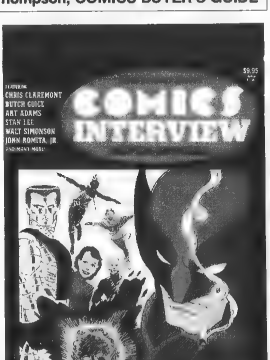

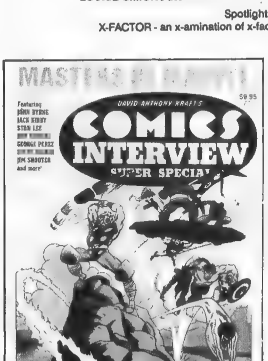

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"I grew up reading Marvel Comics. In the third

Photo: Dave Friedman

RAMBO III ©1988 Carolco Pictures Inc. - The Destroyer ©1990 Warren Murphy. All rights reserved. / Swamp Thing ©1990 DC Comics. / Daredevil ©1990 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc

This photo was taken in the desert outside Yuma, Arizona, when Will was on location with RAMBO III. It's a gag shot, of course!

grade I became familiar with pulp characters."

Destroyer artwork by former illustrator, Lee Weeks.

WILL MURRAY

Will Murray is a multifaceted writer. He ghost writes THE DESTROYER paperback novels. He writes the Marvel Comics magazine, THE DESTROYER. He contributes interviews with major film personalities such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone to STARLOG magazine.

Will Murray is also one of the premier pulp historians in the United States. He received the Lamont Award (named after Lamont Cranston) in 1979 for his contributions to pulp literature . . .

ROBERT ROWE: *How did you become interested in pulp fiction?*

WILL MURRAY: It's process, more than anything else. I grew up in the 1960s, reading Marvel comics, for the most part. THE SHADOW radio show was on in reruns during the nostalgia craze of the early 1960s, and I was exposed to the Shadow and the Green Hornet. I remember, in the third grade, reading 1930s-vintage NANCY DREW novels they had in school. I became familiar with some of the other pulp characters as time went on. The real turning point was in 1969 when I bought my first DOC SAVAGE novel, DUST OF DEATH, and that led me to an interest in the pulps. Although I think prior to that I'd read a couple of the updated SHADOW novels that were written by **Dennis Lynds.**

ROBERT: *And then you started collecting?*

WILL: I guess I started collecting pulp

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Will Murray
Occupation: Writer
Born: 28 April 1953 — Boston, MA
Schooling: University of Massachusetts, 1979
First Professional Sale: I don't even know where I would make that distinction. That might have been the afterword to the Doc Savage novel THE RED SPIDER in 1979.

"I ghosted THE DESTROYER in 1982. It was book #56,

magazines in 1971. I think I bought a SHADOW or two. I got very interested in DOC SAVAGE from the first. When I discovered pulp fandom — which at the time consisted of the fanzines PULP and XENOPHILE and THE HERO PULP INDEX — I began to get in touch with dealers who had pulp magazines and started buying them.

Doc Savage was my primary interest. Having access to a lot of DOC SAVAGE pulp stories that weren't in paperback exposed me to the more mature end of the DOC SAVAGE series, the stories of World War II, the Cold War, and beyond.

Some DOC SAVAGE pulp fanzines were floating around in those times, and the first one I encountered was the DOC SAVAGE READER. I got the first issue, and I thought the people writing for this didn't know as much about Doc as I did.

ROBERT: *Right.*

WILL: At that time, I was fooling around with writing fiction in my spare time, although not marketing it. So I wrote a Doc Savage story for this fanzine, and it was very, very well received from the first. I did a second one for a later issue. The magazine went under but, on the strength of that, I got involved with the book THE MAN BEHIND DOC SAVAGE, which **Robert Weinberg** edited in 1974.

At that point, where I began to be published on that level — from a fanzine to a modest book — I started to think in a serious way about writing as a career. And I went to college and wrote as I studied, so to speak.

Things happened. Doors opened. I met people.

ROBERT: *Sure.*

WILL: I got involved with Odyssey Publications, which was a big pulp publishing house during the 1970s, and became a partner in that company. I started out writing introductions to our pulp reprints, and then I graduated to putting out my own fanzine, DUENDE, which culminated in the book THE DUENDE HISTORY OF THE SHADOW in 1980.

I guess being involved with Odyssey was a big turning point because it gave me a focus for a lot of my energies, and we did a lot of books. Some of them were pulp reprints but, as time went on, more and more became original scholarship I would publish.

I became involved with Bantam Books in selecting DOC SAVAGE novels after I got the unpublished novel THE RED SPIDER — original title: IN HELL, MADONNA — into print in 1979.

ROBERT: *Did you discover that manuscript independently and bring it to their attention?*

WILL: In a way. It was a complicated process, and I'm very proud of having done this. The first inkling I had there was an unpublished DOC SAVAGE novel was when I was going through the Street & Smith payment records that Condé Nast held in their New York offices in the 1970s. I discovered a payment card for a DOC SAVAGE novel called IN HELL, MADONNA, and no one had ever heard of it. No one noticed there had been an unpublished DOC SAVAGE novel.

So I immediately contacted Syracuse University, where the Street & Smith manuscripts and papers are held, and they couldn't find the thing or said they couldn't. They wouldn't look for it because, although they'd had the collection for 20 years, it hadn't been catalogued.

ROBERT: *Yow.*

WILL: I took a trip up there and, after a lot of hurrah, got into the warehouse. I didn't find it. They subsequently were motivated to catalog everything, and they never found it. So I contacted **Mrs. Dent, Lester Dent's** widow, and she found it.

Then began a very tricky process of getting the thing into print. **Mrs. Dent** didn't own the rights to the novel but had the only existing manuscript anyone knew of. Condé Nast had the rights but not the manuscript. Bantam Books had the license to publish Doc Savage but didn't have anything else.

So I had to arrange a situation — and at that point, I was acting as **Lester Dent's** literary executor — to get the manuscript into print. That involved **Mrs. Dent** being paid for the rights to the story even though she didn't have rights.

This snapshot is of Will and Warren Murphy (Warren's the one with the cigarette), creator of THE DESTROYER.

ENCOUNTER GROUP. I was happy to have done one."

Condé Nast agreeing to this, and Bantam Books agreeing to publish it.

It took about three or four years before it all came together. We thought the thing was lost, for a long time. I still remember the day a copy of the manuscript came into my hands and I read it. It was a tremendously good story.

ROBERT: *Yes.*

WILL: It was shocking. I half-expected something that was limp. But it was actually quite exciting.

ROBERT: *Now, the next big step for you was becoming the ghost writer for THE DESTROYER series of novels, right?*

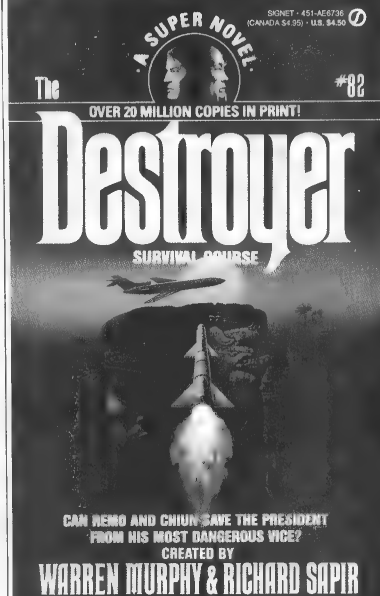
WILL: Yes, it was pretty much in that time frame. Back around 1980-1981, I went into business with one of my Odyssey partners to take over a mystery fanzine called SKULLDUGGERY. We published experimental fiction. I think we called it "The Magazine of Fiction Noir." When I became involved in this, I wanted to interview modern mystery writers, and I was more interested in the writers who were not given a lot of attention. I was thinking of the modern pulp writers, the male action writers such as **Don Pendleton** of THE EXECUTIONER series and **Joseph Rosenberger** of THE DEATH MERCHANT series.

During that same time, I'd become a big fan of THE DESTROYER series, although I had been aware of them for years. I read most of them in the course of 1980 or 1981, and I was really excited about interviewing **Warren Murphy.** So I did an interview with him, and he put me in touch with **Richard Sapir,** who was living in Boston at that time. I interviewed him also.

I put the interview together, and the magazine went belly up. At one point, PREVUE magazine was interested in running it, but that fell through.

After about a year — I'd been in touch with **Dick Sapir** regularly and done some research for him for some of his non-DESTROYER novels — he and Warren approached me about taking that interview and expanding it or building a book out of it or using it as a core of a book. They wanted a nonfiction bible about the Destroyer which I essentially would assemble for them. That interview was the thing that made them think of me, and they wanted that in there.

That book became THE ASSASSIN'S HANDBOOK, published in 1982. While I was writing that book, they asked me if I would ghost a DESTROYER, which, of course, I was only too happy to do and was secretly hoping that that might dawn on them at some point.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Cover illustration to the 82nd volume of Remo & Co.

I ghosted my first DESTROYER in 1982. It was book #56, ENCOUNTER GROUP. Warren mentioned to me, "If we like the book, we might talk about a multi-book contract," when I finished the manuscript.

He liked it, but he had a ghost at that point who was going to leave but decided not to leave. That ghost is **Molly Cochran,** whom Warren later married. She stayed on another couple of years, which effectively left me out of the running. And there followed a chain of events that were designed to keep me from writing any more DESTROYERs.

One of those is that Warren and Dick took the series to NAL, and one of the agreements was that there wouldn't be any ghosts: Warren and Dick would write the books. I was told that even **Molly Cochran** wouldn't be doing the books anymore. There was no place for me. I was happy to have done the one I did.

"I think Dick Sapir decided to take the series."

Photo: Russell Jeffcoat

This was taken in Savannah, Georgia during the filming of THE RETURN OF THE SWAMP THING. That's Dick Durock under the foliage.

ROBERT: *Sure.*

WILL: Then, after a couple of years, Warren and Dick decided they didn't want to collaborate anymore. I think Dick decided to take over the series. He contacted me about working with him, and we went through quite a number of attempts to write books together, all of which collapsed into degrees of ruin. I think I wrote one complete DESTROYER, which ended up being book #63, which Dick threw out and rewrote completely, or almost completely. I think I collaborated with him on another one and quit in the middle of that one. He wrote another one, I think book #65, from one of my outlines which I'd never tackled, having quit on the previous book.

He came back to me a year or so later. All of his other ghost writers had gone through the same thing I had and couldn't work with him. I agreed to do a book with him if we could do the book I wanted to do. And I'd already done a couple of chapters and an outline for a book he'd initially turned down. I said, "If you let me write that, I'll do it."

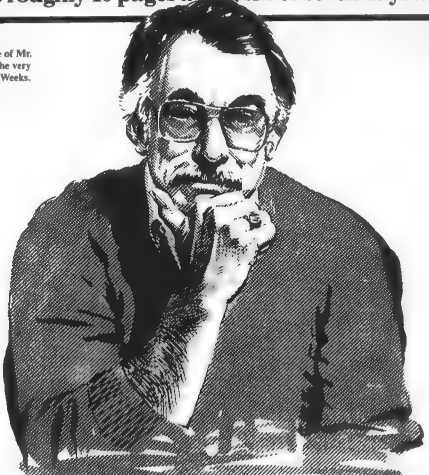
So I started writing the book and got most of the way through it. Dick managed to sit on the outline and then rewrite it and then get it rejected before I'd finished the book. He wanted me to stop that book and start another one. I wouldn't do it so, once again, that was the end of me and THE DESTROYER.

Then, **Warren Murphy** decided my draft would be salvageable. Dick had turned the series back over to him in one of their sort of talking-to-each-other and not-talking-to-each-other situations.

ROBERT: *Right.*

WILL: Warren had me finish the book which ended up being book #69, BLOOD TIES. He rewrote it pretty extensively. Word reached me that Warren was sick of the Destroyer and was going to be folding the series. He

"I'll write roughly 10 pages a day, six or seven days a week."



Portrait piece of Mr. Murphy by the very talented Lee Weeks.

hadn't expected to be writing them anymore when Dick took over the series. It would be Warren's swan song.

I offered to write the last book in the series, and he took me up on it. That was book #70, THE ELEVENTH HOUR. I wrote that, he did a polish, and that was the end of THE DESTROYER.

Three weeks later, he called me and said would I do four more. I said, "Sure, but we just retired the characters." He said, "Well, un-retire them. Make it work." So I signed on to do four more books. **Dick Sapir** suddenly passed away within a week or two of my agreeing to do that, so it was all very eerie the way the timing went.

ROBERT: *Yes.*

WILL: So I started doing them regularly, beginning with book #71, RETURN ENGAGEMENT, but without Warren rewriting them. I've been doing them ever since, with Warren aiding and abetting on the outlines, and enjoying it very much. THE DESTROYER is a modern pulp series, and I'm happy to be doing something like that.

ROBERT: *Describe your work methods. How do you go about plotting your novels?*

WILL: Typically, every December or January I write four plot premises of approximately one page in length each, which I run by **Warren Murphy.** He agrees to them and sometimes makes suggestions. As we go along through the year — the contract I signed with Warren and the contract Warren signed with NAL is predicated on those four one-pagers — I take the one-pagers and turn them into four-to-six-page outlines, which are very loose. They're not broken down by chapter. They just indicate the trend of the story. Then, once they're approved, I immediately lose the outlines and just stumble through the novel. Sometimes I'll field the outline on odd Tuesdays and see where I should have been. Usually it's a process where the story tells itself.

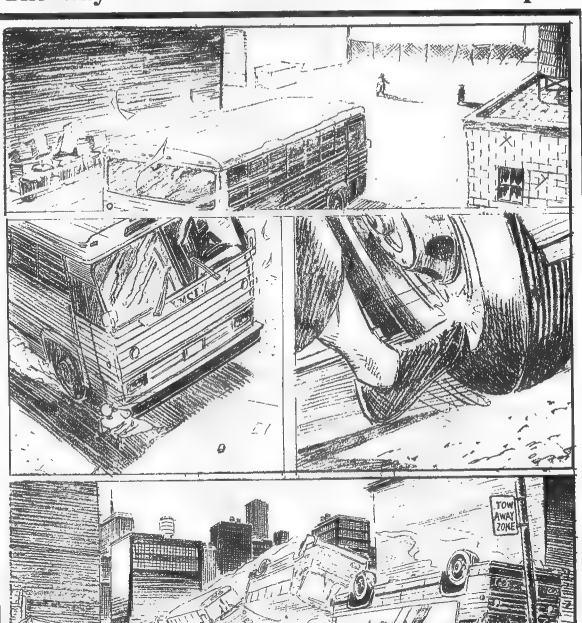
My working method is: I block out about six weeks to write the novel in. I don't write the novel exclusively; I usually write other things for STARLOG or whomever. I'll try to write roughly 10 pages a day, six or seven days a week, with some days being occupied with other writing or not writing at all.

I'll do a draft on the computer, a very fast draft. I'll revise that and print it out, do hand corrections, input them, do another revised version, and usually at the end of six weeks I'll have a novel I absolutely hate. But the deadline is here, so I send it in. By the time it's typeset, it seems like a pretty good novel.

ROBERT: *How many words does 10 pages represent?*

WILL: I don't know. But when I say 10

"The way I do a DESTROYER comic script is



Here & next page: DESTROYER pencils by Weeks (featuring Chiun).

pages a day, that's my trotting pace. I can do as many as 30, but I don't do 30 a lot. I mean, there have been a couple of times where I wrote the first 100 pages of a DESTROYER novel — rough draft, I'm talking here — in about four days flat.

ROBERT: *Wow.*

WILL: That's a *rough* draft. That's just sitting there and pounding out the words, not even trying to hit the right keys half the time. I'm a one-fingered typist. I'm a terrible typist. If I were a touch typist, I probably could write them in three or four weeks.

I have written a 90,000-word DESTROYER in 30 days flat, once. But you push that kind of level and you find you can't write for a while after that. And I find when I have my heavy days — 20 to 30 pages — I pay for it.

ROBERT: *Yes.*

WILL: But it's not unusual for me to do 10 and 20 pages a day fairly often.

ROBERT: *What sort of computer do you use?*

WILL: It's an IBM clone. I had a guy put it together for me. I use WordStar.

basically what I do when I do a first draft of a novel."

ROBERT: *Do you have to switch gears mentally when you write scripts for Marvel's DESTROYER magazine?*

WILL: Surprisingly little. The way I do a DESTROYER comic script is basically what I do when I do a first draft of a novel. DESTROYER novels are dialogue driven. My comic stories are dialogue driven.

In both cases — novels and comics — I sit down and sketch in the action, describing it as lightly as possible, and just let the characters speak. And Remo and Chiun do their own talking, believe me. *(Laughter.)* I have little to say about it.

ROBERT: *Hmmm.*

WILL: It may sound strange, but that is the way it often works. These are wonderful characters to work with, and they handle themselves once I put them in a situation.

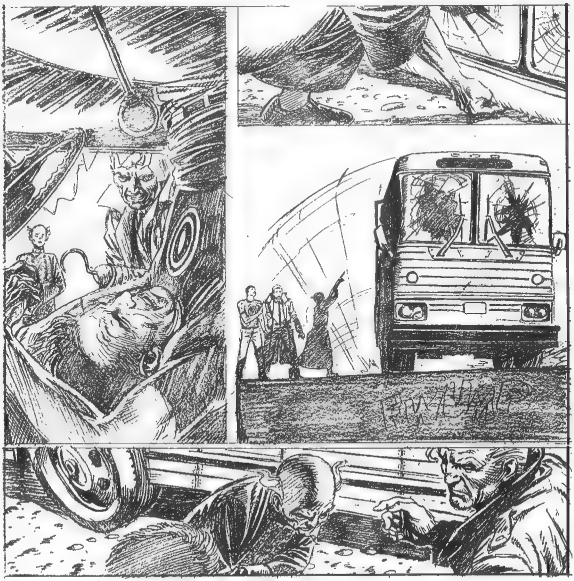
What I get in a comic story is a script of approximately 15 pages that looks, if it looks like anything, like a radio script. There's no breakdown by page or panel. It's a description of the action and all the dialogue. Sometimes in fight scenes I'll skimp over the dialogue. I won't write captions until I get the artwork back. When I do get it back, I rewrite the script. I strip away all the description, and I make the dialogue match the art. I often rewrite the dialogue, punch it up, add new dialogue, add new things, add different layers. So the dialogue essentially gets two or three drafts if not more, in that fashion.

ROBERT: *I see.*

WILL: Because these characters are so alive and because both media are dialogue driven, there's not that much difference in approach. In fiction, you're not supposed to tell, you're supposed to show. In comics, it's the opposite.

ROBERT: *What's it like working with artist Steve Ditko?*

WILL: I find him a real pleasure to work with. He's extremely professional. He'll get the story in not only on deadline, but usually before deadline. He's a legend to me, so I enjoy talking to him about politics, the world situation, or comics, or sharing experiences in terms of me



On Lee Weeks: "He set the pace for the book. He

Example of that "other" work Lee is doing (DAREDEVIL 286 splash).

was an absolutely perfect choice to do the book."

More action pencils from Marvel's DESTROYER (again, by Weeks).

being a novelist working in comics and him being — to me — one of the most intelligent and creative guys in comics to this day.

ROBERT: *Artist Lee Weeks has really grown during his tenure on THE DESTROYER magazine. Has that been noticed by others?*

WILL: On a black-and-white title, you tend not to get noticed that much. I do hear from my editors that THE DESTROYER is a very popular book in-house. They like the writing. They like the art. They find it very different, very refreshing from the average run of Marvel comics.

As far as **Lee Weeks** being appreciated, I don't think he's appreciated as much, because he left the book recently. THE DESTROYER #10 will be his last issue. Although he'd like to do more stories, and I'd like to do more stories with him, he wants to do other things as well. And THE DESTROYER is a big task, because they're 40-page stories on average, and he likes to ink his own work. When you're doing a 40-page story, you can't always do that.

ROBERT: *Sure.*

WILL: At the moment, Lee has bowed out of THE DESTROYER.

He set the pace for this book. He was an absolutely perfect choice to do this book. I not only wish he could've continued the series, but that he could've done more than the six stories a year he was committed to. We are doing long stories. It's very hard on an artist to grind these stories out.

ROBERT: *Did the movie REMO WILLIAMS: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS do well?*

WILL: In the theatres, it was a disappointment. On cable and on video, it's become somewhat of a cult film. It's very popular to this day. It still shows up on UHF and cable stations, much to my surprise.

ROBERT: *I see it turning up all the time.*

WILL: It's obviously popular, more for the characters than the story. It was a pretty terrible story. The villain was pretty wretched. I give it a "B" when it should have been an "A" movie.

Maybe they'll make another one. I mean, they did a sequel to SWAMP THING seven years later because it was a hot cable and video item. There has been a REMO television pilot, which aired about a year and a half back. In some ways that was better, although the casting still left something to be desired.

ROBERT: *Does the fact that Warren Murphy co-wrote the story for LETHAL WEAPON 2, a highly successful movie, create interest in Hollywood in doing another REMO movie?*

WILL: You'd have to ask Warren that. I'm not sure that it does or it doesn't, because Warren had something to do with the writing of the first REMO movie. If they do another one, knowing Hollywood, they probably won't ask Warren to write that either, but they'll ask him to write another LETHAL WEAPON. *(Laughter.)* It's a strange mentality out there.

I know the option has come up, and Warren has been approached or has approached people about doing another one, but I don't think it's the same production company, and I doubt it would be the same cast.

It's all very tentative.

COMICS REVUE

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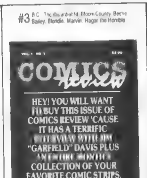
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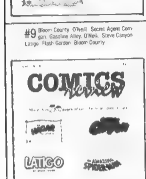

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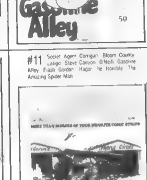

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"There's a great magazine, COMICS REVUE."

RICK NORWOOD

Rick Norwood has been involved in early science fiction fandom, was active at the dawn of comics fandom, and has gone on to realize some of his dreams from the early days — one of which is the publishing of "The Greatest Comic Book Of All Time" (also the biggest and most expensive).

Rick's love of the comics medium flourished, even after he became a college professor, and today he continues to edit COMICS REVUE, the magazine of adventure strips, which is now a member of the Comics Interview Group of publications.

In this talk with fellow fan turned comics professional Anthony Tollin, Rick reveals his view of the comics field today, and some of his dreams for tomorrow . . .

Photo and costume: Mary Norwood.

ANTHONY TOLLIN: *You've been active over the years in a number of different areas of fandom. I first became aware of you as one of Julie Schwartz's primary letter hacks in the early 60s. I remember one GREEN LANTERN letter column where you had three separate letters under three different names; only the address gave you away. How did you first become interested in comics and how did you become active in fandom?*

RICK NORWOOD: Well, there were four of us and we were all students at M.I.T. at the time, and we were all very enthusiastic about what's now called the Silver Age — of course this was long before the phrase "Silver Age" was invented. We were very excited about the new Green Lantern, the new Flash, especially **Joe Kubert's** Hawkman, and we played The Game — we just called it The Game — which is where you take the comic-book stories and you assume that they are *true* and then you try to find real scientific explanations for the preposterous things that **Gardner Fox** and **John Broome** and the other writers of the time would dream up.

TONY: *This game, of course, works better if your friends are all at M.I.T. with you.* (Laughter.)

RICK: Well, you know, The Game was originated though we didn't know it at the time — by the Baker Street Irregulars. They take the Sherlock Holmes stories of **Arthur Conan Doyle** as their sacred canon — or sacred Conan, I guess

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"I was not for the split between comics

— and treat it as if it were the gospel truth and then they try to explain away all of the mistakes that **A. Conan Doyle** made in the writings by saying, "Well, that's Watson. He's absent-minded. You can't ever trust Watson. But Holmes, now he's real."

TONY: *When did you go from being an oddball comic collector with a few oddball friends at M.I.T. to discovering comics and science-fiction fandom, getting involved with conventions or fanzines?*

RICK: Well, I'd been going to science-fiction conventions before I went to M.I.T. I went to my first science-fiction convention in 1958, '59, something like that — it was ChiCon III. I'm sure I have the dates wrong, but at that time there wasn't . . . I started to say there was no comic-book fandom. At that time comic-book fandom consisted of two people, **Jerry Bails** and Roy something-or-other who I think went on to write some comic books. Anyway, **Jerry Bails** and **Roy Thomas** were publishing ALTER-EGO and that was comic-book fandom. That's all there was

TONY: *Well, there was also XERO.*

RICK: There was XERO, **Richard Lupoff's** fanzine. He published a *wonderful* series of articles on comic books, "All in Color for a Dime," but they were published in a science-fiction fanzine. They were just one series of articles in that fanzine **Don** and **Maggie Thompson** did some. **Harlan Ellison** did an article for him. But it was *not* a separate fandom at that point. It wasn't a separate fandom until ALTER-EGO came along.

TONY: *But you were one of what would be comics fandom's first fandom?*

RICK: If I were in comics fandom, but I was in science-fiction fandom.

TONY: *Right, but you once speculated on a comics fandom first fandom.* (Laughter.) *CAPA-alpha, I think.*

RICK: Oh, speaking of CAPA-alpha, I remember writing **Jerry Bails** and saying, "Let's start the first comic-book apa. We'll call it C.A.P. for Comic Amateur Publishers." **Jerry Bails** wrote back and said, "Nah. I haven't got time for any of that stuff. I'm too busy publishing ALTER-EGO." And then about three months later he came out with CAPA-alpha. *(Laughter.)* I wouldn't have been so put out except he didn't ask me to be a member.

TONY: *Al Kuhfeld was a member and didn't even intend to be a member. He sent a long letter to Jerry Bails and found it printed as his contribution to the first issue of CAPA-alpha.* (Laughter.) *But you were involved in comics fandom in the early '60s, what there was of comics fandom.*

RICK: Al **Kuhfeld** was one of the original M.I.T. four.

TONY: *You were involved with fan publishing and such.*

RICK: In comics fandom very little. I was publishing a science-fiction fanzine. I got science-fiction fanzines. I'll tell you, I tried to bring . . . I was not for the schism, the split between comics fandom and science-fiction fandom. Nowadays I think it was probably a good thing that the two split off, but at the time comics fandom was a part of sf fandom very

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Rick Norwood
Occupation: College Professor, Publisher, Editor, Writer
Born: 4 August 1942 — New Orleans, LA
Residence: Mountain Home, TN
Credits: Editor, COMICS REVUE; Publisher, Manuscript Press; Stories in ANALOG and TWILIGHT ZONE MAGAZINE, Forthcoming Book on Mathematics
Favorite Television Show: DARK SHADOWS
Favorite Aardvark: Cerebus
Favorite Writers: Robert Heinlein, T.H. White, J.R.R. Tolkein, Theodore Sturgeon, Alfred Bester — I could go on and on

Original ad for the first issue of Green Lantern, 1960.

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fandom and science fiction fandom."

much like STAR TREK fandom is a part of sf fandom. I was against this separatist movement to lead the comics fans off on their own way. At one point, in fact . . . Let me give a little background: The organization to bring newcomers, neo-fans, into science-fiction fandom was the N.F.F.F., the National Fantasy Fan Federation; and at one point I had a letter published in the STRANGE ADVENTURES comic book giving the name and address of the N.F.F.F. A few months later I ran into the secretary of the N.F.F.F., **Janie Lamb,** and she said, "My God, who are these *strange* people who are writing me these letters wanting to join the N.F.F.F? They don't read anything but funnybooks!" *(Laughter.)* I think about that time it began to dawn on me that maybe it was better that the two fandoms went their separate ways.

TONY: *However, as I remember, the Minnesota Science Fiction Society, I think the original five members got together, or got into science-fiction fandom, because of that letter.*

RICK: Really? *(Laughter.)* They read that letter in STRANGE ADVENTURES? I never knew that.

TONY: *There was something involving a letter in STRANGE ADVENTURES about science-fiction fandom.*

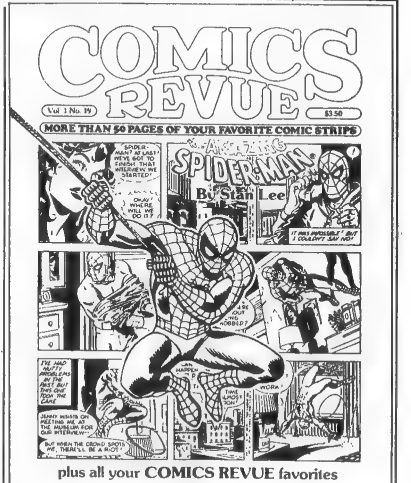
RICK: I wondered where **Frank Stodolka** got my name and address. That must have been it.

TONY: *So, you have seen comics fandom grow and change, especially the price tags on back issues.*

RICK: I remember offering **Al Kuhfeld** a whole dollar for a JLA BRAVE & BOLD. It was the height of extravagance at the time.

TONY: *How do you feel about comics fandom today in comparison with comics fandom of years ago?*

RICK: Well, I can't compare it because, as I say, I wasn't in comics fandom. I can compare it to science-fiction fandom. It has its good side. It's younger, and it's in some ways more enthusiastic and less cynical than science-fiction fandom. On the other hand it doesn't have, I think, the deep current of idealism that science-fiction fandom has. You talk to the average comics fan and what he's interested in is how much his copy of SPIDER-MAN #53 has appreciated between one issue of **Overstreet's** PRICE GUIDE and the next. I find the rather *pathetic* emphasis on how much the value of comics has gone up one of the distasteful aspects of comics fandom. I don't go to comics conventions very much anymore partly 'cause I'm sick of



getting ripped off. No, I said "ripped off" and I don't like that phrase. I'm sick of having people steal from me, and *thieves* use the phrase "ripped off" to make it sound like what they're doing is cool. But it isn't cool when somebody steals a comic, like someone stole a CEREBUS #1 from me. It makes you feel bitter and angry and ready to say to hell with conventions. So the *greed* of comics fandom frightens me sometimes, especially since these kids who think that their SPIDER-MAN #53 is worth $14.60 — I'm making a wild guess as to what the PRICE GUIDE says it's worth — are going to find out when they take it into a comic shop that they're lucky if they get a buck for it. What the dealers pay and what **Overstreet** says a comic is worth, they're two different things entirely. Well, it's understandable; a dealer has got to make a profit. If he bought comics at his selling price he'd go out of business in nothing flat. But a lot of kids don't understand that. They think that the PRICE GUIDE value of a comic book is the amount of money that they can realize on that comic book. It just ain't so.

TONY: *Right. I've also become distressed with that in comics fandom. The other thing that I find that has changed a great deal is the emphasis on the now. In the mid '60s we were fascinated by the tradition, by the history. There was a sense of history and tradition. Also, there is a lack of variety in comic books today. We don't have the funny animal, the humor, the children's, the westerns . . .*

RICK: We have Cerebus. Cerebus is a funny animal. But I know what you mean. Yes, there is an overwhelming glut of super-heroes.

TONY: *Your mention of CEREBUS, I think, represents another subject, and that is the independent market, which you are a part of with COMICS REVUE.*

"The average adult in America doesn't think

RICK: It's what keeps comics alive for me. If there were nothing *but* DC and Marvel, if that was the world of comics, I probably would have stopped buying comics entirely a long time ago. The independent comic shop is what makes the alternative publishers possible. If there was not a cottage industry here in this country of independent comic shops, you wouldn't have CEREBUS or ELF-QUEST or WEASEL PATROL or any of the other wonderful books that are around now.

TONY: *But the independents, looking at the sales figures, STEVE CANYON 1 think sells 3,000 copies an issue. Do you feel there is any way around that, any way to get a larger number of readers?*

RICK: Well, I think that it's happening. I think that, for example, the fact that some of the independent works are getting into Waldenbooks is a wonderful sign. You have to realize that the average adult in America doesn't think comic books are being published anymore. They used to be in every bus station. Every newsstand, every stationery store, every supermarket or convenience store had a rack of comic books, and that just isn't the case anymore. People don't casually run into comic books. To see a comic book you have to make an effort to seek out a comic book. but now with the racks in Waldenbooks an awful lot of people who just *read* for pleasure are going to see a comic book and pick it up and thumb through it. Now, if they pick up a Marvel comic I think that they're going to put it down pretty fast — not that there aren't a few good Marvel comics but that you've got this *enormously* convoluted continuity. So you pick up the current issue of X-MEN, it may have good artwork and a good **Chris Claremont** script - but you say, "What the hell is going on here? Who are all these characters wandering around talking about a lot of people and places and background material that I've never heard of before? I haven't the *foggiest* notion of what's happening in this book." On the other hand you pick up an issue of ZOT! and you read it through, you get a lot of pleasure out of it as a self-contained thing. Maybe it has a three-part story but it doesn't have a 250-part story. It doesn't have continuity that's been going on . . . Don't get me wrong, I am a continuity freak. I *love* continuity, but you have to build that *into* a story that's enjoyable in itself.

TONY: *Well, now that's a change that's occurred in comic books in the last 20 years, the emphasis on continuity perhaps coming to take precedence over a clear, concise, enjoyable story.*

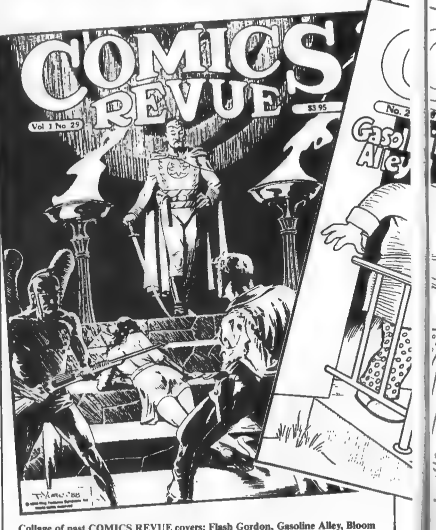
RICK: The trouble is, in my opinion, that the fans have taken over the comic books. They're comics fans, they've grown up on comic books, some of them have read nothing but comic books, they are writing comic books and drawing comic books *for* other comic-book fans to enjoy, with a lot of little fan references and fan jokes and fan names and characters in the background; and so they say the Cosmic Cube has reappeared and all the comic-book fans get a tingle because they know what the Cosmic Cube is and what the Cosmic Cube does, but a person picking up a comic book for the first time, the reference to the Cosmic Cube is going to go right past him. Very often in a Marvel comic, how many times have you seen the *climax* of the story has been the revelation of who the villain is? You get this full-page panel for the last page of the story and it's Magneto, and you get a *chill* if you know who Magneto is, but if you've never heard of Magneto before, this is no climax to a story.

TONY: *Except that the climax of the story was already given away on the cover.*

RICK: That happens sometimes too, if they're not paying attention.

TONY: *But you've been reading comics for some time. You grew up as a comics fan whose interest in comics was frowned upon by your parents, is that right?*

RICK: Well, I think anybody . . . any parent who had a kid in college who was reading comic books in the early '60s was



Collage of past COMICS REVUE covers: Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Bloom County, Steve Canyon.

comic books are being published anymore."

going to feel like that was shameful. Comic books were read by little-bitty kids. Adults just did not read comic books at all, ever. They read the newspaper comics, but they did not continue reading comic *books* much past, well, age 13 or 14 without being looked at as peculiar — and of course I grew up in the '50s when the attitude in this country was *enormously* conformist. If you wore your hair below your collar, even an inch below your collar, you were looked at like some kind of *dangerous* freak. It's hard, I think, for people growing up today to *realize* just how restrictive life in the '50s was — how strong the forces for conformity were.

TONY: *However, you were collecting before you got to M.I.T., right?*

RICK: Before I went to M.I.T. I had a very small collection. I had a checklist of my collection and I had set aside one page of the checklist for DC comic books. Most of the rest of the checklist was science-fiction magazines and books. I figured at some point in my life I might accumulate enough comic books to fill up a whole page in my listing of my collection. I was a science-fiction fan long before I was a comic-book fan. While I was at M.I.T. we had BRAVE AND BOLD with the Justice League of America, we had FANTASTIC FOUR #1, we had AMAZING ADULT FANTASY with Spider-Man. It's interesting because at the *time* all the comics fans considered Marvel Comics to be a very inferior imitation of what DC was doing. We never dreamed that Marvel would become the force in comics that it is today.

TONY: *You once wrote a letter to Stan Lee, in fact . . .*

RICK: *(Laughter.)* Yes, asking him why **Don Heck** didn't draw everything in the Marvel line-up, and he wrote back and his answer was in the form of a comic-book script — I've still got it around here somewhere — and he said something like this:

SCENE, MARVEL COMICS OFFICES. STAN LEE OPENS LETTER FROM RICK NORWOOD WHICH SAYS THAT NOBODY ON HIS STAFF CAN DRAW WORTH BEANS EXCEPT DON HECK. SOUND EFFECT: BANG! SPLAT! BOOM! ENTIRE MARVEL COMICS STAFF BLOWS THEIR BRAINS OUT BECAUSE RICK NORWOOD DOESN'T

COMICS REVUE

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#13 Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo, Bloom County, Steve Canyon, O'Neil!, The Amazing Spider-Man, Hagar the Horrible

#14 The Amazing Spider-Man, Bloom County, Steve Canyon, Gasoline Alley, O'Neil!, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo

#15 Latigo, Secret Agent Corrigan, Bloom County, The Amazing Spider-Man, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon

#16 Gasoline Alley, The Amazing Spider-Man, Bloom County, Flash Gordon, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, Latigo, Secret Agent Corrigan

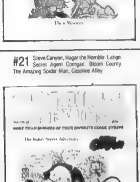
#17 Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo, The Amazing Spider-Man, Bloom County, Steve Canyon

#18 Hagar the Horrible, Secret Agent Corrigan, Blondie, Steve Canyon, Bloom County, The Amazing Spider-Man, Gasoline Alley

#19 The Amazing Spider-Man, Bloom County, Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo, Steve Canyon, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Gasoline Alley

#20 Flash Gordon, Bloom County, Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, The Amazing Spider-Man, Gasoline Alley

#21 Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, Latigo, Secret Agent Corrigan, Bloom County, The Amazing Spider-Man, Gasoline Alley



Annual 1 Bloom County, Steve Canyon, Pogoyo, Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, The Amazing Spider-Man, Gasoline Alley

#22 Bloom County, Secret Agent Corrigan, The Amazing Spider-Man, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley

#23 The Amazing Spider-Man, Bloom County, Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley

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"My paper added SKY MASTERS — it was wonderful!"

Artwork by Jack Kirby and Wally Wood with stories by Dave and Dick Wood.

LIKE THEIR WORK.

I came around. I came to like **Kirby** and **Ditko.** But you have to admit if you look at those old FANTASTIC FOURs and very early SPIDER-MANs that the artwork is pretty crude by today's standards. Not anything like the slick stuff that **Gil Kane** was doing on GREEN LANTERN, or that **Kubert** was doing on HAWKMAN.

TONY: *Well, possibly one of the reasons Don Heck looked so good by comparison was he was doing his own inking?*

RICK: True, and **Kirby** had some *really* lousy inkers in those early days. *(Laughter.)*

TONY: *Didn't I read somewhere recently that FANTASTIC FOUR #1 was inked by Artie Simek, the letterer?*

RICK: *(Laughter.)* I wouldn't be surprised. It wasn't until I guess, oh, FANTASTIC FOUR #30, #35, something like that, that the **Kirby** art really began to shine.

TONY: *This was when you were writing a lot of letters. Julie Schwartz was the first editor who really, I think, started doing things with his letter columns.*

RICK: Well, the EC letter columns around '53, '54, but in the modern sense, yes.

TONY: *What was it like being a letter hack? Did you get a lot of personal response from Julie?*

RICK: Oh, it went down to visiting. we'd all jump on a train that left Boston and we'd nde down to New York, get there around 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning. It's funny, coming from M.I.T. we all wore slide rules on our belts — this was before the days of the pocket calculator and so if you wanted to do computations you had to whip out your slide rule — so we all wore slide rules on our belts, and we'd get off at Grand Central Station and we'd go out into the streets of New York over to the DC offices, which were at 575 Lexington Avenue at the time, with these long, leather-cased slide rules on our belts, and all of the Puerto Ricans would move to the other side of the street. *(Laughter.)* We had no idea why we were getting that particular reaction. But Julie was very nice to us. He was very generous with original art and with his time and introduced us to all of the artists and writers up at the DC offices. There was a rumor going around that **Bob Kane** never drew Batman. Now, I don't know how much **Bob Kane** drew, but I stood behind him at one of these tall drawing tables that they had at the DC offices at the time and watched **Bob Kane** draw a figure of Batman in a DETECTIVE COMICS story, so he did some art as late as the early '60s.

TONY: *How about as a letter hack? You were writing huge volumes of correspondence.*

RICK: *(Laughter.)* That's why I flunked out of M.I.T., I spent too much time with my hobby. But yeah, it was fun. It was a real thrill to see your name in print, of course.

TONY: *But you didn't write under your own name.*

RICK: That's true because, as you mentioned, my parents were prejudiced against comic books. I wrote under the name **Rick Wood** and sometimes under various other pseudonyms — but just seeing my letter in print, knowing that it was mine, was a thrill.

TONY: *Were you as interested in newspaper strips, and especially PRINCE VALIANT which has become the collecting love of your life, at the time as you later became?*

RICK: I started collecting newspaper strips when I was about twelve years old. At that time I collected MANDRAKE THE MAGICIAN and I collected ROY ROGERS, and then later on my local paper picked up SKY MASTERS, which I just loved. It was a wonderful strip. **Jack Kirby** penciled it and **Wallace Wood** inked it, and it's a beautiful science-fiction strip. Very hard to find nowadays.

TONY: *Who wrote it?*

RICK: Who wrote it? A pair of brothers whose last name was **Wood.**

TONY: *Dave and Dick Wood.*

RICK: Dave and Dick, okay. I never

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#24 Popeye Flash Gordon Lingo Bloom County Steve Canyon Hagar the Horrible Secret Agent Corrigan Gasoline Alley

#25 Secret Agent Corrigan Popeye Lingo Bloom County Flash Gordon Steve Canyon Gasoline Alley

#26 Modesty Blaise Bloom County Lingo Popeye Steve Canyon Hagar the Horrible Flash Gordon Gasoline Alley

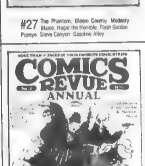
Popeye • Flash Gordon • Lingo

#27 The Phantom, Bloom County, Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Popeye, Steve Canyon, Gasoline Alley

#28 Bloom County, Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, The Phantom, Popeye, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley

#29 Flash Gordon, Bloom County, The Phantom, Hagar the Horrible, Modesty Blaise, Popeye, Gasoline Alley

#30 Mister Carroll Marmaduke Howie Steve Canyon



Annual 2 Modesty Blaise Bloom County The Phantom Hagar the Horrible Steve Canyon Popeye Flash Gordon Gasoline Alley

#31 Lingo, Bloom County, The Phantom, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, Flash Gordon, Popeye, Modesty Blaise, Gasoline Alley

#32 Bloom County, The Phantom, Popeye, Lingo, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Modesty Blaise, Steve Canyon, Gasoline Alley

#33 Popeye, Modesty Blaise, Flash Gordon, Bloom County, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley

#34 The Phantom, Bloom County, Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, Popeye, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, The Wallet Family Tree

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"I thought PRINCE VALIANT was too hard to read."

knew who wrote it because it was just signed **Kirby** and **Wood**, and I didn't *know* either of those names. I didn't know who **Jack Kirby** was when the SKY MASTERS strip first came out in '57. I just knew it was good. It was scientifically accurate. It was imaginative. It was head and shoulders above, say, BUCK ROGERS, which was pretty pitiful at the time.

TONY: *At that time were you just collecting the newspaper strips as they came out or were you already trying to find older ones?*

RICK: I just clipped them out of the local newspaper and filed them away in shoeboxes; and at the time, it's interesting, I didn't collect — I didn't even like — PRINCE VALIANT. I thought it was too hard to read when I was twelve. I liked the quick, fast action strips like MANDRAKE. I didn't *really* learn to like PRINCE VALIANT until I got a little older.

TONY: *Rick, how was Manuscript Press first formed, how and when?*

RICK: Well, it's interesting, I was at the launch of Apollo 11, the first moon launch, and I was at a party at **Joe Green's** house .

TONY: *Who is Joe Green?*

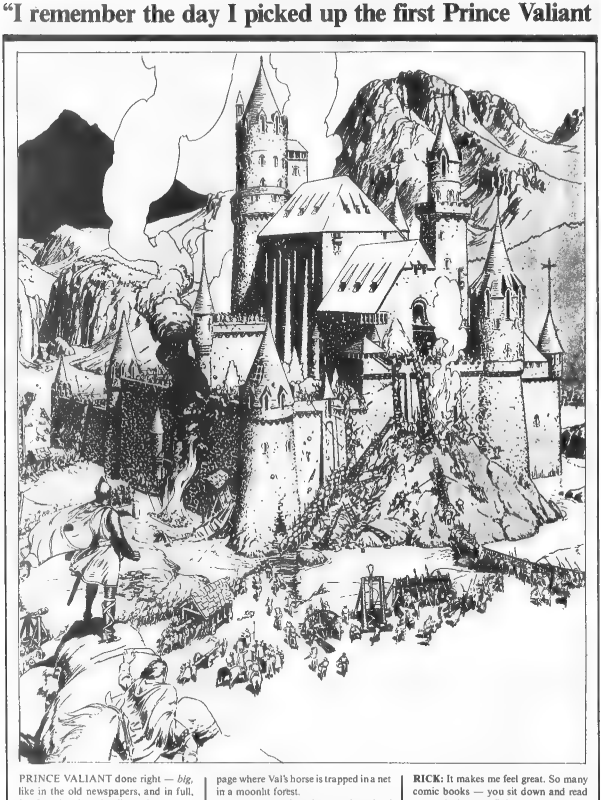
RICK: A science-fiction writer, and he had some of my favorite science-fiction writers as guests there: **Arthur Clarke, Robert Heinlein,** and **Hal Clement,** who has written a number of *absolutely* wonderful science-fiction stories the most famous of which is MISSION OF GRAVITY. **Hal Clement** at this party mentioned to me that he had this manuscript that had never been published, a novel-length manuscript called LEFT OF AFRICA, and I said, "I'll publish it!" Now at that time I'd never published anything in my life. I had no idea how I was going to go about publishing this novel, but I wanted to *read* it so bad that I was willing to publish it in order to get to read it, and so the first Manuscript Press book was **Hal Clement's** LEFT OF AFRICA. And then after we published LEFT OF AFRICA, a manuscript by another great science-fiction writer, **R.A. Lafferty,** came across my desk unexpected out of a clear blue sky and I published that. And so I started off with science fiction, and that gave me, I think, some of the experience that was necessary to publish the PRINCE VALIANT books. One reason that the PRINCE VALIANT books were so long in coming is that they couldn't exist if it weren't for distributors and outlets for the books there would be no hope of publishing them at all.

Prince Valiant by Hal Foster.

TONY: *You advertise PRINCE VALIANT as the greatest comic book of all time — and, with a $100 cover price, it is also the most expensive comic book of all time. Why did you reprint PRINCE VALIANT in such an expensive format?*

RICK: In the words of Super Chicken, "If you've got a thing, and you want it do, yourself should you." I wanted to see

"I remember the day I picked up the first Prince Valiant



PRINCE VALIANT done right — *big*, like in the old newspapers, and in full, *bright* color. I can't tell you how many hours I spent with **Ed Whitbread,** who was in charge of color separations, getting the autumn colors of the leaves just right, or checking every detail of the page where Val's horse is trapped in a net in a moonlit forest.

TONY: *King Edward VIII of England called PRINCE VALIANT the greatest masterpiece of English literature in this century. What makes PRINCE VALIANT so great?*

RICK: It makes me feel great. So many comic books — you sit down and read one and when you finish, you realize you just wasted fifteen minutes. PRINCE VALIANT takes you back to the days of King Arthur and Camelot. The characters are all very human and likable, but

reprint. It was like being hit in the face with a mud pie."

the scale is epic, larger than life.

I remember when I saw STAR WARS for the first time. I drove home on the freeway — it was late at night, not much traffic. I started swinging the car from lane to lane, like I was flying an X-Wing fighter. PRINCE VALIANT makes you feel like that.

TONY: *How did you get started publishing PRINCE VALIANT?*

RICK: Well, the first PRINCE VALIANT reprint was published by Nostalgia Press, and we were all *so excited* at the thought of having the early PRINCE VALIANT strips in beautiful reprints that we just couldn't *wait* for the books to hit the bookstore. And then I can remember vividly the day that I walked into a bookstore and picked up the first Nostalgia Press PRINCE VALIANT reprint and I opened it up and it was like getting hit in the face by a mud pie. It was just pathetic. The colors were washed out and ugly. Entire *panels* would be colored solid purple or solid pink. It was a terrible disappointment. That day I vowed that I would reprint the PRINCE VALIANT strips and do them right, and it took me more than ten years to get together the money and the materials and the artwork, the colorists, that I needed for the project. But it was worth the wait.

TONY: *I certainly agree. What has the reaction been to the PRINCE VALIANT reprints?*

RICK: Critically, the reaction couldn't have been better. I thought a long time before I called it "The Greatest Comic Book of All Time," because that sounds like so much hype. But I can't think of one better, *ever,* in the history of the world! For art, for story, for production values.

TONY: *Why did it have to be so expensive?*

RICK: It took a lot of money to do it right. There's no other way to publish it. I've been a little disappointed that a lot of people have never seen it. I know it's expensive, but that's what public libraries are for. If you can't afford a book then your public library should be able to order it for you, so at least people can read it and enjoy it.

TONY: *Since you began publishing your deluxe PRINCE VALIANT, beginning with the first strip of the first year, Fantagraphics has begun their own PRINCE VALIANT series starting . . . what year was it?*

RICK: I believe they started with some late '50s . . . '57 strips? Something like that, but now they have reprinted the

first strips.

TONY: *How has that affected you?*

RICK: Well, I'll tell you, when I first heard that Fantagraphics was coming out with a PRINCE VALIANT series my gut reaction was sort of a pang, like they're invading my turf, they're stealing my idea. But when I thought about it I realized that what they're doing is really a wonderful thing because not everybody can *afford* $100 comic books, no matter *how* good they are. When I sell a PRINCE VALIANT book I'm selling to the people who buy videotapes, who buy laser disks, who buy expensive toys — in other words, professional people. A lot of the people who buy my PRINCE VALIANT books are doctors or lawyers or in business. The Fantagraphics PRINCE VALIANT series anybody can afford, and so it's going to *introduce* PRINCE VALIANT to a whole new generation of readers in an affordable form — and I think that anybody who reads the PRINCE VALIANT books from Fantagraphics is bound to get hooked and want to read the origin, the beginning of the PRINCE VALIANT story, in the Manuscript Press editions. The Fantagraphics books are smaller, the color isn't as good, but they're enormously readable. They're very well done and you can't beat 'em for the price. The price is outstanding.

TONY: *After your first volume of PRINCE VALIANT came out you took over the publishing of COMICS REVUE. How did that come about?*

RICK: Well, I had *wanted* to do a MENOMONEE FALLS GAZETTE type magazine for a long time, in fact ever since the MENOMONEE FALLS GAZETTE folded. There's no better way to read comic strips than THE GAZETTE.

TONY: *I had wanted to read a MENOMONEE FALLS GAZETTE type magazine for some time ever since the MENOMONEE FALLS GAZETTE folded.* (Laughter.)

RICK: Yeah, the good old MENOMONEE. I don't know if people today *know*

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#36 Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Modesty Blaise, Lalngo, Popeye, The Phantom, Bloom County, Steve Canyon

#35 Bloom County, The Phantom, Beetle Bailey, Hagar, Boondocks, Flash Gordon, Mother Goose & Grimm

#37 Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, The Phantom, Lalngo, Blondie, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley

#38 Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Bloom County, Steve Canyon

#39 Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Lalngo, Popeye, Steve Canyon, Bloom County, Gasoline Alley

#40 Outland, Lalngo, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon, Bloom County, Flash Gordon, Modesty Blaise

#41 [illegible] Modesty Blaise, Bloom County, Gasoline Alley, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon

#42 Calvin and Hobbes, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Modesty Blaise, Outland, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Bloom County, Batman

#43 Batman, Bloom County, The Phantom, Hagar the Horrible, Lalngo, Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon, Outland, Steve Canyon, Calvin and Hobbes

#44 Modesty Blaise, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Calvin and Hobbes, The Phantom, Outland, Lalngo, Bloom County, Batman

#45 Batman, Outland, The Phantom, Hagar the Horrible, Blondie, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon, Bloom County, Lalngo, Calvin and Hobbes, Modesty Blaise

#46 Flash Gordon, Modesty Blaise, Blondie, Bloom County, Lalngo, The Phantom, Calvin and Hobbes, Steve Canyon, Batman, Gasoline Alley

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"LATIGO would be enjoyed by those who enjoy the FF."

about THE GAZETTE. It was the size of a tabloid newspaper and it was on good quality paper, and on each page you'd get a week of daily strips — so you'd have six daily strips to a page — and it was a weekly publication. It carried some very good strips, and they had a companion magazine, the MENOMONEE FALLS GUARDIAN, which reprinted the humor strips. Unfortunately they weren't able to make a financial go of it and they went out of business after about three years, and since then several different people have *tried* to publish GAZETTE format. But I really think a tabloid format is an awkward size object to offer people. COMICS REVUE is a standard magazine size, it fits nicely on your shelf, it's monthly instead of weekly which greatly reduces postage costs, and it does reprint a complete run of comic strips so that you get everything. The paperback reprints almost always skip a lot of the strips.

TONY: *And COMICS REVUE's focus is on comic strips that are currently being published?*

RICK: Right.

TONY: *What are your feelings on the state of the art in newspaper comic strips today?*

RICK: Well, it's no longer true that comic strips are universally better than comic books. In the '40s and '50s the quality of the comic strips was much higher than the quality of the comic books. The comic strips have declined and the comic books have improved to the point where now the best of each is worth reading. I would say that a strip like LATIGO would be enjoyed by very much the same people who enjoy THE FANTASTIC FOUR. A strip like GASOLINE ALLEY would be enjoyed by the same people who enjoy CEREBUS. And the *number* of really fine comic strips has dwindled to the point that I think that COMICS REVUE publishes all of the really great story strips.

TONY: *Are you satisfied with the strips you're currently running?*

RICK: I don't like them all equally. An editor can't just publish his own tastes.

9
MY MA MA DOESN'T WANT A LOT.
10
OF ANIMALS IN THE HOUSE!
11
OH! MAMA LOOK WHAT THESE ANIMALS ARE DOING
12
ITS ONLY ME, MAMA! DEAR
I KNOW IT IS; BUT DO NOT MAKE SO MUCH NOISE, NEMO!
WINSOR McCAY

Little Nemo in Slumberland, circa 1906.

"It frightens me that some people read nothing but comics."

He has to consider what the readers are going to like. But I think we have some absolutely wonderful strips. The current STEVE CANYON, for example, is a delight. There was a time when **Milton Caniff** was subject to a lot of editorial censorship and STEVE CANYON, I think, bogged down and became very talky — in the middle '60s, let's say — but then **Caniff** took over the syndication of STEVE CANYON himself and the last ten years of the strip are a lot wilder, a lot more fun.

TONY: *Can you give an example?*

RICK: There was a torture scene in STEVE CANYON that a lot of editors thought was too strong and they *dropped* the strip. I think it's a better strip for not being watered down to please everybody.

TONY: *What comic strips are you currently running in COMICS REVUE?*

RICK: STEVE CANYON, of course. Let's see . . . MODESTY BLAISE, FLASH GORDON, BATMAN, GASOLINE ALLEY, CALVIN AND HOBBES, THE PHANTOM, BLOOM COUNTY, LATIGO — that's our only reprint strip, but it was just *such* a wonderful strip that I really wanted to run it.

TONY: *What are your plans for the future of COMICS REVUE?*

RICK: Well, right now I'm mainly concerned about keeping a regular schedule, providing fans with a *dependable* source for their comic-strip needs. When I was self-publishing, we came out erratically. Now that Comics Interview Group has taken over, we have not missed a month in more than a year. Our main thrust at the moment is trying to get COMICS REVUE into more and more comic shops. Those shops that handle it have done very well with it, but one of the problems is it *sounds* so much like COMICS INTERVIEW. I can't tell you how many comic shops I've gone into and said, "Hey, there's a great magazine, COMICS REVUE. Why don't you carry it?" And they say, "We already carry it," and point to an issue of COMICS INTERVIEW. That is one reason we changed the title from COMICS REVIEW to COMICS REVUE. Also, it is a revue. It isn't a review at all.

TONY: *Do you feel that the increased outlets via Waldenbooks and B. Dalton will help retain comics fans who might otherwise drift out?*

RICK: Retain them and bring new adult readers in. I think one of the reasons that strip publications like PRINCE VALIANT, COMICS REVUE and STEVE CANYON MAGAZINE don't have larger circulations is that the average of the comic-book fan is still quite young. When I was twelve years old I didn't like PRINCE VALIANT or STEVE CANYON. I liked ROY ROGERS. As I get older I was lucky in that there were comic books for older readers, CEREBUS and ELFQUEST for example. If there had been nothing available but super-heroes I think I would quickly have tired of super-heroes. Like so many of the comics fans who came into comics fandom on the wave of the super-hero, I discovered ducks. **Carl Barks,** I think, was in large part responsible for keeping me *interested* in comic books. I'm hoping that as the average age of comics fandom grows — and it's got to grow or comics fandom is simply going to disappear at some point — there will be more and more markets for books aimed at young adults and adults and not this enormous number of books which really, I think, can only be enjoyed by someone in the 12- to 15-year-old range. It frightens me that we've got a lot of people in comics fandom who read *nothing* but comics. I read a lot of comic books for pleasure, but I don't read *exclusively* comic books for pleasure. I would say comic books form maybe a quarter of my reading,

Interesting illustration by Milton Caniff, creator of STEVE CANYON, TERRY AND THE PIRATES, DICKIE DARE, etc.

"I would like there to be more comics written for adults."

comic strips another quarter, science fiction another quarter, and just general literature the final quarter

I had a dealer table at a comics convention down in Texas, and to attract attention at this dealer table I had a penny sale. You give me a penny and I give you something off the table. This one 15-year-old kid came up and gave me a penny and I gave him a science-fiction pulp worth $2.00 or $3.00 — I think it was a THRILLING WONDER STORIES — and he went away and he came back after a while and he had the science-fiction pulp open to the inside pages and he says, *(whiney voice)* "How do you expect me to read this, it hasn't got any pictures?" I took it back and I gave him a comic book, but the idea that a 15-year-old can't read something unless it's got word balloons and pictures is to me a very frightening concept. Now, I'm a comics fan. I like to read comic books and so for my own selfish pleasure I would like there to be more comic books written for adults or for people who read something other than super-heroes and like something other than super-heroes, and I think for that to happen clearly you need an outlet, a place for adults to go to buy their comic books. Unfortunately right now at a certain age, I would guess around junior high school, there's an enormous peer pressure to stop reading comic books, in fact to stop reading entirely; and if a writer for TIME wants to express how *pathetically* written a movie or a TV series or a play is, if he wants to use the worst criticism of it that he can possibly come up with, he says it's like a comic book. "Comic book" has come to be part of the language meaning something cheap and shoddy and trashy It's going to be an uphill struggle to overcome that.

TONY: *Why do we have that association in this country of comic storytelling even though we have wonderful comic strips*

"I would say 99% of the Golden Age comics are terrible."

Bloom County • Steve Canyon • Popeye
COMICS REVUE
Vol. I No. 22
SECRET AGENT X-9
FLASH GORDON
BACK-TO-BACK WITH YOUR FAVORITE COMIC STRIPS!
QUIZ: YOU SEEM TO HAVE CONCENTRATED ON MILITARY HISTORY!
When you get older, Corky, life is one big booby trap!
Popeye • Flash Gordon • Hagar
COMICS REVUE
The PHANTOM
by LEE FALK
MACK OF MIST
SEVEN CASTLES
I HAD TO, DO, O LOOSE IS THE CITY!
HOW DO I EVER EXPLAIN? WELL, NEVER! FORGIVE ME! NEVER!

like STEVE CANYON and GASOLINE ALLEY?

RICK: Well, you have to realize . . . No one ever says something is like a comic *strip* and means it in this derogatory way. Comic strips were wonderful adult entertainment for a great many years. Comic *books* were at first cheap and shoddy *reprints* of comic strips, and then when DETECTIVE and ACTION COMICS came along they were cheap and shoddy *imitations* of comic strips; and those fans of comic books who are enjoying the relatively sophisticated comics of today, if they turn and look at a comic from the so-called Golden Age they're going to be appalled at how terrible the artwork is and how simplistic the stories are. There are a few exceptions, but I would say 99% of the comic books published in the Golden Age are terrible. There is just no other value judgment you can make about them unless your critical sense has been dulled to the point of vanishing entirely. "Comic book" came to mean shoddy and cheap because they *were* shoddy and cheap. Now there are a number of comic books that I would recommend to any intelligent reading adult. I think anyone could enjoy CEREBUS. I think that anybody could enjoy AMERICAN FLAGG or WATCHMEN. But you have to overcome a prejudice that is very hard to overcome. It can be done, because "science fiction" twenty years ago had the same derogatory connotation that "comic book" has today. If TIME wanted to characterize an idea such as space flight or laser beams — death rays — as being preposterous they would say that it was science fiction and everyone would *know* that this was intended in a derogatory way. Well, that's not the case today. Nowadays science fiction is respectable, and I think that ten or twenty years from now comic books could be respectable — but for that to happen we have to have comic books that are written for adults. I can't see an adult enjoying X-MEN unless he or she was wholly locked up into this Marvel Universe schtick. On the other hand I could see anyone going from the latest mystery novel by **Dick Francis**, let's say, or the latest science-fiction novel by **Ursula LeGuin** and picking up an issue of SANDMAN and reading it with considerable pleasure.

But before an adult is going to pick up a copy of SANDMAN first they have to see a copy — which they can do now in Waldenbooks — and second they have to be able to overcome the prejudice inherent first in comic books and second in a title like SANDMAN. I mean, I'm a college professor in my spare time and I can't see going up to another faculty member and saying, "Hey, I've discovered this really great comic book, it's called SANDMAN!" *(Laughter.)* I don't think they're ready for this yet. They need to have their consciousness expanded. We need a group of comic books that are in some ways acceptable to adults.

COMICS REVUE is such a magazine.

So is STEVE CANYON MAGAZINE. There's no stigma attached to reading comic strips. In fact CALVIN & HOBBES is, what, the #1 bestselling paperback in the United States today? Everybody reads comic strips, and so comic strips can be an introduction into the world of comic books. First you read STEVE CANYON MAGAZINE or COMICS REVUE and then maybe you're ready to pick up CEREBUS or WATCHMEN.

TONY: *What hopes do you have for comics in the future? You said something earlier about kids being pressured not to read. How are we going to have adults reading comics in the future . . .*

RICK: . . . if we don't have adults reading at all? Yes. It's scary. My own

"Comic strips have definitely declined!"

kids are getting a lot of peer pressure from their friends at school *not* because they read comic books — not looking down on them for reading at too low a level — but because they read *at all* and most of their friends do not read for pleasure, ever. It's a strange and rather frightening phenomenon that reading for pleasure — when I was a kid everybody read THE SHADOW or THE HARDY BOYS or read something for fun -- nowadays we have a whole generation of kids that never reads for fun. It's strange. If the current trend toward illiteracy — and I'm told that now the illiteracy rate is up around 25% in this country — if the current trend toward illiteracy continues, the *least* important outcome is going to be the death of the comic book. How about the death of the United States for a scary outcome? Of course, comic books are an enjoyable introduction to reading, and yet most teachers and librarians *frown* on children reading comic books. They would really rather the kids didn't read anything at all than read comic books

TONY: *And yet, for example, the Army and the military use comic books as teaching tools. Why don't we see more of an expansion of use of comics as an educational tool?*

RICK: Well, **Larry Gonick** has done some really great educational comic books. I think schools would greatly benefit their students by using his books on history, genetics, computer science. I think schools could use COMICS REVUE to teach reading. But they don't. A lot of people start out on FANTASTIC FOUR and then go on to read **Anne McCaffrey,** let's say, and the DRAGONRIDERS OF PERN series, and pretty soon they're reading DUNE or **Heinlein** — so comic books certainly *can* be a road to literacy, and in that sense they are a powerful educational tool. Comic books teach how much fun it is to read.

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Many issues of COMICS INTERVIEW have become so sought-after that they are no longer available as back issues or the collectible market has pushed the prices up on the original issues.

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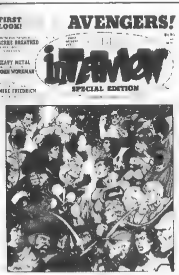
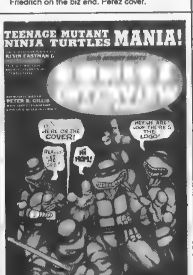
ELFQUEST. A pow-wow with the Pinis on ElfQuest, the creation of an elfin world. John Costanza, letterer, tells all of being an artist. Stan Lee goes Hollywood, and the beginning of a legend now the Comico bunch, on their dreams and schemes for the future. Pini cover.



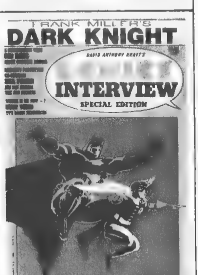
JLA-AVENGERS. George Perez and Roy Thomas tell all about a project that never saw print. Perez's never printed art, only available here! Also John Workman on Heavy Metal, Berke Breathed on Bloom County, Mike Friedrich on the biz end. Perez cover.

JUDGE DREDD VS BATMAN. Brian Bolland spills the beans on this project, first time round. Am Saba saddles Neil the Horse. Don and Maggie Thompson give an inside view of the Comics Buyer's Guide. Bolland cover.

ROBOTECH. Carl Macek & Neil Vokes - from TV to comics - tell why Robotech's a hit. Phil Foglio - Hugo Award winning Sci-Fi artist mumbles about Myth-Adventures, and Cat Yronwode on art for art sake and comics for comics sake. More. Vokes & Rankin cover.



TEENAGE NINJA MUTANT TURTLES Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird give it up. How Turtles Mania began..(look where it went..) Stan Drake on the colorful career of his girls, Kelly Green and Blondie. Peter B. Gillis on censorship, comedy & death! Eastman & Laird cover.



DARK KNIGHT. Frank Miller expounds on his magnum opus. Fred Finger, on his father, Bill. Bob Kane, on the last 50 yrs since Bat birth. Jerry Robinson, on past memories. Burt Ward on the trouble with tights, and George Roussos on the early days. Miller cover.

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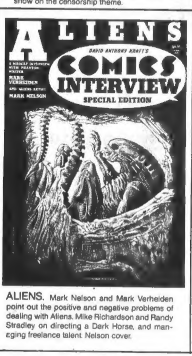
— Don Thompson
COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE

FRAZETTA. Frank Frazetta. This artist of great renown shares his thoughts on many media from comics to fine art. Frazetta cover.

SEX & VIOLENCE IN COMICS. Frank Miller, John Byrne, Jerry Perles together with Ron Turner all expound on the limits and far-reaching effects of laws and perceptions. Plus an open forum from the star-reach Chicago trade show on the censorship theme.

WATCHMEN. Alan Moore reveals what he thinks of super-heroes, and talks about his controversial creation. Daniel Greenberg and Ray Winninger on the WATCHMEN game modules. Hank Rose on the secrets of a marketeer. Dave Gibbons cover.

LONE WOLF. Frank Miller speaks his mind. Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima, creators of a Japanese legend, in a talk from Tokyo. Plus First Comics crew Rick Obadiah, Kurt Goldzung, Alex Wald, Paul Guinan, Willie Schubert and Rick Oliver. Kojima cover.



ALIENS. Mark Nelson and Mark Verheiden point out the positive and negative problems of dealing with Aliens. Mike Richardson and Randy Stradley on directing a Dark Horse, and managing freelance talent. Nelson cover.

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

DISAPPOINTED WITH BYRNE

Dear **Mr. O'Neill,**

I was disappointed with your recent **John Byrne** interview for several reasons. While it was nice to hear John clear up and explain his side of the story in his various jobs with Marvel and DC, I don't believe it should have been the entire focus of the interview. You managed to muddle your way through 15 pages without hitting on some rather interesting and important points for a man who has had as great an impact on comics as anyone. You continued to ask the same kind of editor questions until the end, forcing John to reiterate what had already been said several times. It was fine and dandy to cover this material, but after exhausting it why not move on? I would have enjoyed some questions concerning his NAMOR series and why he decided to pick up the pen to revitalize this particular character. How about which was his favorite comic to work on or does he have a dream project (something he has always wanted to do)? What does he think of the X-Men of today?

I almost feel cheated in a way, because I believe that you only portrayed John in a one-dimensional light. The brilliance and beauty this man has brought to the comic-book medium was never really displayed or spotlighted in your article. I do not want you to misunderstand my point. I am grateful for the issues that were presented so that some understanding could be shed upon them — and yes, I also understand the title of your article. Yet, you could have retained the integrity of the title and issues you sought to discuss and still have infused it with some other, and lighter fan-related inquiries.

Cary Brayboy
2901 S. Sepulveda #132
Los Angeles, CA 90064

The whole point of the John Byrne interview was to get him to respond to the controversies that had surrounded him, particularly since his abrupt departures from both SHE-HULK and the AVENGERS titles. That was made clear, I thought, from the cover lines "Byrne Talks Back!" and "John Byrne: Threat or Menace?"

That being the case, since his decisions to leave the various titles over the years have largely been based on disagreements with his editors, I thought his opinions on what makes a good editor, what the relationship between a creator and an editor under the work-made-for-hire arrangement should be, and how those opinions shaped his desires for a change in his working environment, were the essence of why we were interested in talking to him.

John Byrne's work has been spotlighted in many places in recent years — including a major interview just a short time ago in COMICS INTERVIEW #71. I myself talked to him about NAMOR in COMICS SCENE earlier this year . . . and NAMOR also got play in Marvel's house PR organ, MARVEL AGE. There is no shortage of public comment from Byrne about his newest project.

I definitely thought the questions I asked were "fan-related inquiries". The fans I talk to want to know not just what a creator is doing on his latest project, but how he thinks, how he chooses his projects, and what the state of the industry is — all concerns John and I discussed in our talk.

I was happy with the content of the Byrne interview; so was DAK; and, as far as I know, so was John Byrne.

— Pat O'Neill

INTERVIEW IS GREAT!

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing in reference to issue #78 of COMICS INTERVIEW, specifically about the article on **Todd Reis's** art collection. I found this section most interesting, and a real eye opener in the way that it shows a single theme and how each artist has interpreted it. Also, I would just like to thank you for the great job that you do with COMICS INTERVIEW. Keep it up.

"The Gurch"
45 Wells St.
Scunthorpe
S. Humberside
DN15 6HL England

HOW DO WE SELECT OUR INTERVIEW SUBJECTS?

People of COMICS INTERVIEW:

Being an avid fan (a collector of over 25 years) of comics, I take a great delight in the reading and collecting of comics. So I enjoy magazines such as yours (of which I have almost the entire run, minus only seven) telling me about the creators, funny, true stories of this medium.

For all of which I would like to say, "Thank you, **Mr. Kraft.**"

Now, I could get into different ideas and authors I would like to see in C.I. But I would like to keep this short, maybe next letter. Before I go, one question, and could you answer it (without the DC/Marvel pitter-patter): Who or how do you decide to interview? Is it by readers' choice, or editors, or what?

Thanks for a great #86.

The "Manitoba Maple"
Leslie Matyas
892 Brazier St.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2K 2N9 Canada

Well, Leslie, the correct answer to your question is — all of the above! I am always responsive to reader requests, of course, but I also keep in close contact with the comics field to cover what's current; in addition, we have a far-flung network of freelancers who are always making suggestions for all kinds of off-track and offbeat interviews, from golden age comics creators to movie celebrities. And, finally, every once in a while consulting editor Jim Salicrup or associate editor Darrel Boatz will suggest a subject, as will the editors or publishers at various different comics companies. In the end, the deciding factor of what makes it into any individual issue of COMICS INTERVIEW often comes down to what we can fit into what always seems (even in our big issues with lots of extra pages, such as #70, #75 or #85) to be never enough space for all the interesting interviews on hand. But that's also what makes each new issue of INTERVIEW so exciting to look forward to — thanks for asking how we do it, Leslie, and giving me an opportunity to explain what makes COMICS INTERVIEW my favorite magazine.

— DAK

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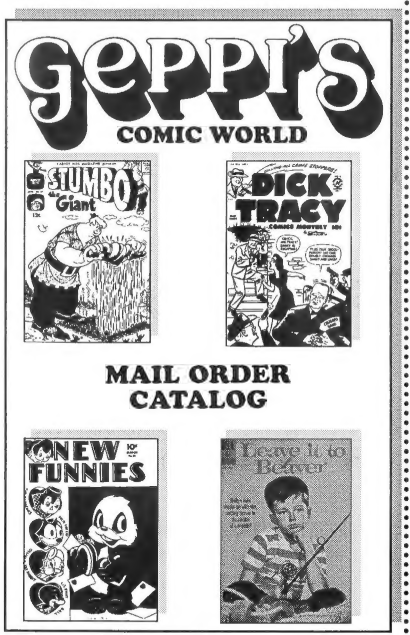

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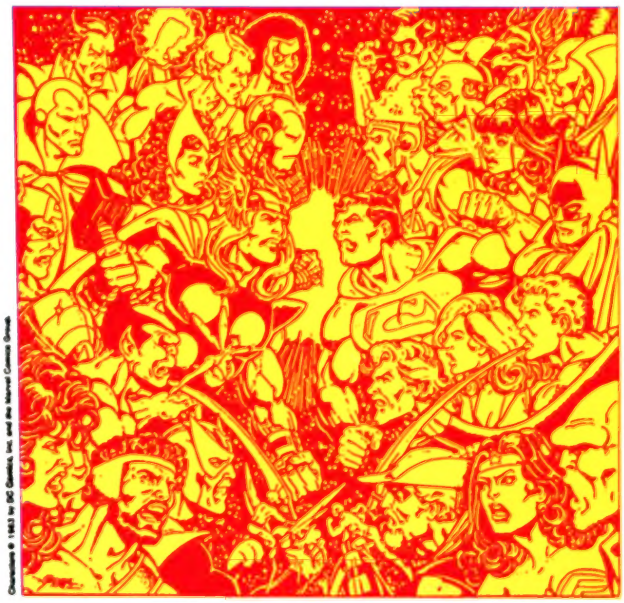

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